

■ The Obedience Corner

By Minta "Mike" Williquette

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Mike Williquette during a training session with UAXCH UUD UCH CH Goose Creek Let Me Entertain You UDX VCD2 AX AXJ RAE PCMH, more simply known as Gypsy. Gypsy earned her UDX, the first PBGV ever to gain this title, as this issue was going to press.



California here we come! Gypsy and I are preparing for our trip to the AKC Obedience Invitational Championship. I don't know if she is excited, but I certainly am. Gypsy, officially known as UAXCH UUD UCH CH Goose Creek Let Me Entertain You UD VCD2 AX AXJ RAE PCMH, is the first of our breed to qualify and be invited to this event. To qualify, a dog must have earned OTCH (Obedience Trial Championship) points during the preceding year. The four dogs with the highest number of points in each breed are invited, unless it's a breed with extremely high numbers being shown such as golden retrievers, then more are invited. However, Gypsy is the first and only PBGV to ever earn OTCH points.

To prepare for this adventure, I have been working with a nationally known trainer. We got together for a private session to map out a training program that would benefit both Gypsy and me. Motivation in the ring is the foremost issue. As Gypsy is extremely food-motivated but smart enough to know when I have food with me, it was decided we would put to use the word "cookie," which she knows very well, as a motivator. The thought is that if her cookies are placed outside of the ring on her crate or a chair, then shown to her before entering the ring, using the word between exercises would remind her that a reward is coming. Since the format at the Invitational is teams will rotate between six rings with a combination of three to four open and utility exercises done in each ring, in training we do two open exercises and two utility exercises, then run to her treats with a lots of praise. Of course, praise between exercises along with the words "cookie, cookie" are used in the ring.

We then decided where Gypsy had training issues, and developed specific training methods for each part of an exercise that was weak or we wanted to reinforce.

I use a PVC box on the ground to teach the go outs for the directed jumping exercise. I will now use it every time Gypsy is sent to the end of the ring on a go out until the show. This way she will not make a mistake of going crooked or too short, thereby losing points. Also, for this exercise, we moved the jumps wider apart and placed Gypsy off to one side of the ring, sent her to the farther jump or put a distraction near a jump. Not all of these things were done together.

Next was perfecting her fronts and finishes. These are usually good, but again we need

perfection so as not to lose points. To achieve this, my husband built a platform that is about one inch high and Gypsy's length and width when sitting. She learned very quickly to get onto the platform, thus sitting straight in front of me and in the finish position at my side.

Another problem has been that Gypsy at times will freeze over a glove instead of retrieving it. We tried putting part of the glove under a ring stanchion so if she didn't pick it up, a correction could be made. However, this scared her, so we needed to find a different solution. We came up with putting the glove on the lower part of the ring gate so she had to work harder to find and retrieve it. This is working well in training. Again, distraction was added. The idea behind this is repeating the correct way so muscle memory will take over when we are in the ring. Note that this is for me as well as Gypsy!

The last and very important exercise was perfecting her heeling. When she wants to be, she is a great heeling little girl, but sometimes the focus isn't there. We will be heeling on leash every training session until we are in the ring. Heeling is included in almost every ring at the Invitational. It is important for me to remember to use physical training and not be dominant with my voice.



Outside the ring, both Gypsy and I are doing a work-out program; I need to work on my balance. Gypsy will have aqua-puncture and physical therapy for the month before the show to make sure she is sound as she is 10 and one-half years old. Meanwhile, I am planning my wardrobe with new purchases, of course. Gypsy doesn't much care, but she may get a new collar and lead while we are in California. I have already purchased a new suitcase that will hold her soft crate — it was not much more expense than the airline extra costs for luggage. My daughter is flying from Wisconsin to meet me in California where she will provide moral support and take photos for PBGV history. I am hoping some of you will come and see us there!

UPDATE: We did it! Gypsy earned her UDX, the first PBGV to earn the title. She finished on Saturday; Sunday she added a first leg on her UDX2. However, we will not pursue this as she will now be training for her TDX tracking title. She has been placing in the Open B and Utility B classes behind many Obedience Champions, most, of course, are golden retrievers and border collies. Gypsy has accumulated over half the points needed for the Obedience Master title, so that will be a goal for next year. I find it hard to accept the fact that she is 10¹/₂ years old. She is in great shape and going strong. ■

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