

Valley Angler

Going to the Dogs

by Bill Thompson

The past few days at the shop have been a little more stressful, to put it mildly. Janet and I have been baby setting our son's 18 month old chocolate lab. As most of you may know we already have a resident lab on board at the shop. In the confines of a shop the size of ours having two labs can make life interesting.

It is not uncommon to find Labrador Retrievers in fly shops. In fact it is almost a prerequisite to have one or even two labs before you even consider opening a fly shop. Certainly, if not a lab, some other sporting dog must be employed by the shop if they are to be taken seriously.

Like all labs of his young age, Lager, can be rambunctious at times. Summer, on the other hand is an experienced shop girl and has matured to an age when life is enjoyed at a slower speed. Summer, who is now seven years old, has developed a routine which for the past few days has been totally turned upside down by this young upstart. Summer knows most of her regular customers almost by name and knows the proper way to greet a new customer. She knows that the shop opens at nine in the morning and closes at five in the evening. She makes a perimeter check of the building soon after opening. This is important because someone might have dropped a piece of pizza or some other eatable from the shop next door. She goes out at noon for another perimeter check and another shortly after lunch. Most of the time she is content to sleep in her bed behind the reel case or on the porch in the summer months next to the front door. Selling boots and waders is Summer's primary job at the shop, at least she thinks so. It is impossible to try on a pair of waders without help from Summer. Outside of that Summer is more than content to beg a little pizza crust or maybe a taste of ice-cream and sleep.

Lager, on the other hand, has no sense of time and gets bored very easily. He has caught on to the idea of greeting customers, however he thinks a great amount of loud barking must accompany every greeting. Given the chance Lager will chase down anything that can be thrown and return it to the thrower for hours on end. To him life is a "ball". Unfortunately he has an affinity for fly tying materials and has on a couple of occasions chewed up a few pieces of material that were within his reach. This morning, for example, he scattered about an ounce of strung peacock herl from one end of the shop to the other. He accomplished this feat in under five seconds. As I said he has no sense of timing and about an hour before closing he has had just about enough of shop keeping and is primed for some action. He is quite vocal with his discontent and will bark until someone gives in and takes him out for a run.

Summer, for the most part, takes Lager in stride and tolerates him. She might not admit it, but it is obvious that she enjoys playing with him. It is a lot of fun to watch them play tug-a-war together with a stick they have just found in the woods. With the exception of a couple of favorite toys she is willing to share and will even give up her bed in the shop to him. Lager thinks that she is great and will not leave her in peace so there are times when some gruff words are exchanged. Lager is rarely deterred and within moments he is back by her side.

All and all, with the exception of a few short comings and who among us does not have a few short comings, Lager is a pretty good dog. His master has gone to a great deal of trouble to teach him the right way. Unlike my dog, Lager will not beg food or get up onto the furniture. Before leaving on their trip my son and his wife gave me strict instructions not to teach their dog any bad habits. Summer and I both questioned their definition of “bad habits”. For the most part I have refrained from teaching “bad habits”.

With the exception of the “peacock herl incident” I have greatly enjoyed having Lager around. I think that we have bonded well. I especially enjoy walking the two dogs together in the morning and they seem to enjoy the experience as well. I must admit that I have got a lot more exercise since Lager has been here and this is a good thing. As for Summer I think that, despite what she says, she truly does like having him to play with. As for Janet, the next time I bring up the subject of getting a second dog, she will only have to say, “Remember what it was like when Lager was here for the weekend”?

See you on the river.