



# BMDCA Info Series

## Bernese Mountain Dogs And Obedience

2014 #7

**Introduction** ► All dogs need to have **good manners!** This is especially true for a large breed dog such as the Bernese. A well-trained dog is a better pet, much easier to live with, more pleasant to take places, and more likely to be a welcome guest. As more legislation is passed in this country to control dogs and their ownership, it is imperative that our dogs be trained. The main reason we have a dog is for companionship. Bernese need a job to do. Obedience training helps the owner to gain control, teach manners, create a very special bond, prevent boredom, help satisfy his/her Berner's need to be with and please his owner, as well as gives the dog a task to accomplish. Obedience training can become an enjoyable sport for both owner and Berner, whether the goal is having a well-behaved pet or earning titles.

**How To Train Your Berner** ► Bernese are a Working breed, developed to have a strong desire to accompany and interact with people. They are intelligent, learn quickly, and strive to please their owners. Positive training methods help to keep them eager and willing. Bernese are impressionable with excellent memories. Training sessions should be kept short to prevent boredom. Be creative in motivating your Berner by using games and play-training techniques. Try to end each training session with your Berner "wanting to do more." Your primary job is to make obedience training interesting and fun. **Male or female?** Either sex presents its own set of challenges! Personality is unique with every dog regardless of sex. A female may be moody with hormonal surges. A male can be easily distracted by all the good smells in the ring. For competition neutered animals of either sex may be ideal as they have a tendency to be more focused on their handler and less on other dogs.

**Where To Start** ► The main reason for obedience training is to develop a pleasant adult dog that is easy to live with. This is a gradual process that will continue throughout the dog's life, for in living with dogs, we are training them to live under our rules. Training dogs requires the 4 "P's" – Patience, Persistence, Positivity, and Praise.

**Puppy Kindergarten (PK):** All puppies should attend Puppy Kindergarten (PK) at 3 to 5 months of age with their owners. Conscientious breeders require this. Look for a class that uses food treats, toys, clickers, play, pats, and lots of "happy voice" praise! PK will provide needed gentling and socialization, satisfy doggy needs to play with other puppies, help owners to acquire valuable knowledge to meet a dog's basic needs, and provide a good foundation for more structured training in coming months.

PK instills confidence and helps shy pups to overcome insecurities. PK gives all pups an excellent head start.

**Good Manners Class:** A Beginners or Good Manners Class is a good way to continue socialization as the dog learns to "watch-me," sit, down, stay, come, leave it, wait at doorways or gates, and heel around other dogs, distractions, and people. It is also a good way for owners to meet other dog owners to talk "dog." Adolescence can be a trying time for owners as the dog learns how to meet human expectations and rules. A dog training class can provide information, guidance, and support. Attendance with your adolescent puppy is strongly recommended. Select a trainer who favors the use of food treats, clickers, and toys for motivation and reward.

**Canine Good Citizen** ► With some training and conditioning, a dog should be capable of earning a *CGC* (Canine Good Citizen) certification when the dog demonstrates good behavior for the testers. Exercises are done on leash and include: sitting/staying while the owner shakes hands with and talks to a stranger; walking on leash without pulling; walking comfortably with the owner through a milling crowd of people; being stroked, examined, or brushed by a stranger; doing a sit and down on command; coming when called; walking past another dog in a controlled manner; accepting a distraction, such as a stroller, bicycle, and/or loud noise; and, staying quietly with another person while the owner is out of sight. Check the AKC website for further information ([www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)).

**AKC Obedience Titles** ► The basic objective of obedience trials is to recognize dogs that have been trained to behave in the home, in public places, and in the presence of other dogs in a manner that will reflect credit on the sport of obedience. Anyone interested in showing in the sport of obedience needs a copy of AKC's **Obedience Regulations**, which is usually available at shows or can be downloaded from the AKC's website. Read and know the rules.

AKC has several Obedience titles that are fun as well as challenging to earn. All titles require the team to earn three qualifying scores (legs).



The **Novice** class is the basic, foundation level. The **CD (Companion Dog title)** is within reach of the majority of dogs. The dog must be able to heel on and off leash, stand for examination by the judge off leash, come when called, and do a group sit and down stay with the other dogs in the class.

**Open (CDX—Companion Dog Excellent title)** is more advanced and requires greater physical effort on the part of the dog. All Open exercises are done off lead. The dog must be able to heel, retrieve both on the flat and over a jump, jump a broad jump, drop on recall, and do a group sit and down stay with the handler out of sight.

**Utility (UD—Utility Dog title)** is the most difficult, requiring the dog to make decisions and work away from the handler. All Utility exercises are done off lead. The dog must be able to heel and perform a down, sit, and come on hand signals alone, do a directed retrieve, a moving stand from heeling with an examination by the judge, two scent discrimination exercises, and a directed jumping exercise, where the dog is sent away from the handler and told over which of two jumps to return to the handler.



**UDX (Utility Dog Excellent title)** requires that a dog must have received qualifying scores in both Open B and Utility B at 10 trials.

**OTCH (Obedience Trial Champion title)** is the ultimate obedience achievement! This Championship requires that 100 points be won by placing in the Open B and Utility B classes.

The AKC also offers the **Obedience Master Program**, which was developed to recognize consistently high scoring dogs who continue to show after earning their UD.

**AKC Optional Titling Classes** ► In addition to the required “Regular” classes of **Novice**, **Open**, and **Utility**, the AKC offers multiple “Optional Titling” classes. They are called optional because clubs are not required to offer these classes at their obedience trials. The Optional Titling classes also require three legs to earn a title. These classes offer a range of variations on the regular class exercises and are designed to further encourage participation in the sport of Obedience.

**Beginner Novice (BN)** is a transition class between Rally and Novice Obedience.

**AKC Non-Regular Obedience Classes** ► Titles may not be earned in non-regular obedience classes. A few of these classes are: **Veterans** for dogs over 7 years of age, **Brace** for two dogs with one handler, and **Team** for four dog-handler teams working together.

**AKC Rally Classes & Titles** ► Rally is intended to provide a link between AKC’s CGC (Canine Good Citizen) Program and Obedience or Agility. The specific exercises in a Rally course are based on Obedience exercises, but you follow a course as in an Agility trial (see the **Agility Info Sheet**). There are three levels of competition in AKC Rally — Novice, Advanced, and Excellent. The handlers are allowed to walk through the course without their dogs at the beginning of the class. Four titles can be earned in AKC Rally competition. The first three titles require the team to earn three qualifying scores (legs). **Rally Novice (RN—Rally Novice title)** is performed on leash. **Rally Advanced (RA—Rally Advanced title)** and **Rally Excellent (RE—Rally Excellent title)** competitions are performed off leash and include jumps. The highest level of competition, **Rally Advanced Excellent (RAE—Rally Advanced Excellent title)**, requires that a dog must have received qualifying scores in both **Advanced B** and **Excellent B** at 10 trials. A complete list of Rally exercises can be found at [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).

There are also non-regular Rally classes for those who enjoy additional Rally variations and challenges.

**Canine Freestyle** ► A new sport evolved from obedience in the early 1990s. Freestyle is a creative combination of obedience and music, with choreography and artistry adding a whole new dimension to dog training. Three US freestyle organizations offer widely varying different approaches to this new and evolving sport. Find out more about the Canine Freestyle Federation at [www.canine-freestyle.org](http://www.canine-freestyle.org), the World Canine Freestyle Organization at [www.worldcaninefreestyle.org](http://www.worldcaninefreestyle.org), and the Musical Dog Sport Association at [www.musicaldogsport.org](http://www.musicaldogsport.org).



**Obedience References** ► Some resources include:

- **AKC CGC Program Brochure and Participant Guide** ([www.akc.org/events/cgc/](http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/))
- **Getting Started in Obedience** ([www.akc.org/events/obedience/getting\\_started.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/getting_started.cfm))
- **Getting Started in Rally** ([http://www.akc.org/events/rally/getting\\_started.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/rally/getting_started.cfm))
- Many Yahoo groups exist for discussion of all aspects of training and handling Berners and other breeds in obedience as well as other events (agility, draft, tracking, herding, etc.).