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## How To Find a Search and Rescue Dog Training School

By Melissa Buhmeyer

There are many things dogs can be trained to do but, of all the tasks a working dog can perform, search and rescue ranks the highest for needing qualified, professional trainers. A Search and Rescue (SAR) dog's performance, quite literally, can determine life or death to a human in need.

As shocking as it may sound, there is no set of standards for rescue dog training. Subsequently, rescue clubs, teams, and individuals emerge as trainers, when, in fact, they may know little, or nothing at all, about training a SAR dog. Attending seminars and reading books on the subject are worthwhile endeavors, but they do not constitute being a SAR dog trainer. Sadly, in a large percentage of cases, this is an assumption not only made, but followed, and replicated. In some cases, those touting themselves as SAR dog trainers scarcely have enough knowledge to teach a dog simple parlor tricks, let alone promptly and accurately scenting or tracking skills, where a human life hangs in the balance.

Even when the topical qualifications are in place, this is no substitute for failing to research the validity of those qualifications. You will hear the term "qualified instructor" often from those with police/military backgrounds. While this sounds impressive, keep in mind that there is no "qualification" standard to begin with, so the very title is misleading. Further, there may be a very good reason that the individual is no longer training/handling outside of the police/military venues. That reason may be a desire for work in the private sector, or it could be indicative of poor performance.

Now, I'm not trying to paint a bleak picture; there are a number of incredible SAR dog trainers out there. All of these great instructors hold one thing in common: they can bear your scrutiny with flying colors. If you're making the huge step towards training your dog for SAR, then you really need to make the right choices. Here are the top things to consider when choosing a SAR dog trainer:

1. Experience. There is no substitute and there is no better gauge of a trainer's value. Look for trainers who have years of experience in a wide variety of disciplines, not just SAR. Demonstrated ability, in more than a single focus, means that the trainer will be able to administer a wide variety of training methods to accomplish the end goal. Other potential disciplines to look for include: agility, obedience, hunting, or herding. This experience is easily verified by titles such as: Companion Dog (CD, CDX) Agility Dog (AD, MACH, NATCH), Schutzhund (I, II, III) to name a few.

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2. Actual SAR experience is a must. SAR dogs perform a number of tasks that your instructor **MUST** have real–world experience with. They need to be well–versed, from first–hand experience, on how lost or fleeing people will act, how a crime scene needs to be preserved in cadaver searches resulting from criminal acts, etc.

3. The trainer should be well–versed on all breeds and capable of assessing and advising on the limitations and capacity of that breed.

4. Separate marketing from proven performance. If your trainer is good, you can bet he or she will have references. Contact those agencies and inquire about the specific services the trainer was hired for and their thoughts regarding the trainer's services. Just because they have a polished web site, well–designed brochures, etc., does not mean they're the best pick, by default. In some cases, a

smaller organization may actually yield better references.

The decision for you, and your dog, to become involved in SAR is a big one. Take the time to do your homework. Your success and enjoyment will not only be richer but it may, in fact, save a life!

Melissa Buhmeyer has been involved in dog training for two years and is the co–founder of

<http://www.dogtraining–school.com>

, a resource for aspiring professional

dog trainers

and all dog

enthusiasts.

### **Is Dog Obedience School for You?**

**By Tina Spriggs**

#### **Is Dog Obedience School for You? by Tina Spriggs**

Are you thinking about dog obedience school? Do you know what to expect out of it? Do you know what it costs or where to find a good school?

If not, let me help take out some of the mystery of finding one to make sure you and your dog get the best experience you can.

If you have searched the web in this topic, you probably found some sites that are basically search engines within search engines, no real information about dog obedience schools. Or you might have

## How To Find a Search and Rescue Dog Training School

found some obedience schools that were on the other side of the country. Needless to say, neither one was of much use.

Chances are you have a dog obedience school of some sort in your town, unless you've got a population of less than 20,000. In that event, you might need to opt for dog training videos or books, and I will go over some good resources for that later.

The first thing I want you to do is look for someone with proven experience. You can start in the yellow pages and look under "Dog Training" as opposed to "dog obedience school."

Ask a LOT of questions. These people are going to be molding the mind of your impressionable pup and you want to know that it's a good fit.

Ask things like:

What will the dog be taught?

What is the success rate?

What happens if you're not satisfied

Will you be taught how to continue with your dogs new training?

What are their methods of correction when the dog disobeys?

Visit the facility too. Check it out. Meet the trainers and see how they act with people and dogs.

Ask if you can watch a training session or a video of a session so you get an idea of what your dog will be subjected to.

Don't make a final decision on a dog obedience school until your dog has met the trainers. Dogs are extremely good judges of character.

For the most part, someone in this line of work is going to be a good person and a dog lover. Some, however, will be doing it just to get a paycheck and may not have your pal's best interest in mind.

If your dog doesn't like them... take another route.

You might want to consider the local 4-H club. 4-H is where I learned how to train my own dog as a child. It isn't a dog obedience school in the traditional sense. It teaches kids how to train their dogs, or a friend's dog. It's a youth education program and it provides many facets of education, one of which is often dog training.

Read more about dog training videos if you would like an alternative to dog obedience school.

Tina Spriggs is an expert dog lover whose lifelong interest in canines provides the motivation for her site. To learn more about dogs or to find gifts and toys for them visit her site [Dog-Gifts-and-Toys-for-Dog-Lovers.com](http://Dog-Gifts-and-Toys-for-Dog-Lovers.com). Copyright 2004. All rights reserved.



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