

Bench and Field by Paul Rawlings

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Learning to be a trainer with the BIPDT

April 29 2011 should now be firmly planted in everyone's minds as that special day when Prince William and Catherine Middleton got married. I shall also remember the day being surrounded by red, white and blue, on pens, clothing and badges of the British Institute of Professional Dog Trainers.

My invite for the wedding obviously must have been lost in the post but having already accepted the BIPDT's invitation to join Kevin Wilson, Norma Ansell and Di Wyant to judge the spring instructors course at Harper Adams Agricultural College on April 28 and 29 I probably would have been forced to decline!

However my day also turned out to be one of special celebration for those course students who were presented with one of the four grades of certificate after the presentation dinner that evening. Even those who did not achieve the required standard will have learned an enormous amount about dog training and instructing while on the intensive week long course. The 27 students had travelled from far and wide to take part, including Cyprus, Dublin and the length and breadth of the rest of the UK.

After arrival and settling in to our accommodation on the previous morning the judging team was given a thorough briefing by BIPDT general secretary Ann Fisher on the format that the two days would take. We had all judged these courses before but it was great, and indeed necessary, to be refreshed on what exactly was expected from us and of course the high standard that the Institute expected from those who were aspiring to gain one of the four grades of certificate on offer. Incidentally attendance and any certificates attained on these courses can be used as valid evidence to justify points claimed for those instructors who are members of the Kennel Club Accredited Instructor Scheme (KCAI) working towards their accreditation.

The BIPDT advanced certificate is the highest accolade possible and those that do achieve this grade may actually be invited back to instruct on future courses so the criteria is set at the highest level and we judges were mindful of that. Following the judges briefing and lunch we then had the opportunity to meet the students in the classroom. I was paired with Di Wyant for the two days and so we met those students who we would be judging in action on day two.

This was an opportunity to meet them and ask questions about their background experience, canine and discipline specific knowledge. The meeting was not a pass or fail situation but it does give the judges a first impression of the students. Hopefully it is also a chance to break the ice, say hello, allay any fears and settle the nerves ready for the subsequent practical demonstrations of instructing ability. Those students taking the field or working trial options at the highest grades began with one of their two practical demos that same afternoon while the rest all had to wait until the next morning.

That evening after supper it was time to 'chill out' in the college bar with some light hearted entertainment by the students; I'm afraid the instructors were the target for much of the humour but it was all taken in good part. The students then showed their gratitude for the work put in by the instructors with the presentation of flowers and gifts to them. The course instructors, Ann Fisher, Barry Walters, Phil Cook, Sharon Lake, Helen Withey are all unpaid volunteers, they do a terrific job promoting good training and in turn responsible dog ownership.

Next morning everyone seemed much quieter over breakfast, the seriousness of the final practical examinations had finally dawned on the students and in some cases the nerves were kicking in. I wondered if Prince William was feeling the same. Di Wyant and I were paired together to judge six second grade students in the morning. They each had ten minutes to take a class and teach them various different exercises.

The first of the three or four exercises was only known to them once they had been introduced to us at the start of their session, then once we were satisfied with that we would give them the next exercise. This really tested their ability to think quickly before delivering their instructions to the class. We were looking for all the qualities required of an assistant instructor including the ability to clearly deliver instructions, to correct faults as they occurred, maintain control, use correct training methods while keeping their own nerves under control.

Our first candidate was a lovely lady from the Highlands of Scotland, Mary Slorance, who had been given the course by her husband for her 40th birthday, believing it to be a dog training course. However Mary was not daunted by the prospect of learning to become an instructor even though she had with her the very first dog she has ever owned, a ten month old Yorkie. I personally did not know how green she was at the start of the week and could only judge those skills she demonstrated for us. Mary was an inspiration, although it was soon obvious she was not yet ready to instruct on her own and with very little hands on experience of training dogs was not ready to instruct under supervision. However she had shown enormous potential both as an instructor and then later as a dog handler when she was acting as a stooge for some of the other students.

We saw what a close bond she had formed with her own dog in a very short time scale and this was also recognised by the course instructors and at the presentation dinner she received the Colin Plum Award for the most improved student on the course.

It was great to see more people taking the field trial option at the higher grades, Gaynor Gent was attending the course for the first time aiming at the graduate grade. However her knowledge of field trials was without question very high, she has achieved with her own dogs at the highest level and her teaching skills were also at the highest level, so following an extra demonstration of her practical teaching she was upgraded to the advanced grade.

There was also celebration for Roger Lees who after disappointment on previous courses has now achieved a pass at the advanced grade in obedience. There were of course some students who did not achieve what they wanted to but pass or fail all of them will go home with a lot more knowledge of the art of instructing and teaching, after all the slogan on the BIPDT folder is 'raising standards through education'.

I can thoroughly recommend these courses for all levels of instructor, you will certainly gain knowledge and make new friends with common interests. I would also like to thank the BIPDT for inviting me to judge and for the hospitality extended during my stay with them. For further information go to www.bipdt.org.uk.

BIPDT Course awards:

Certificate in Basic Instructional Techniques – 2nd Grade

Pass: Sally Stroh, Ruth Deverall-Palmer, Linzie Warren, Naomi Thorn, Sue Hart, Jane Rice, Rob Morgan. Honours pass: Caroline Hall, Rosie Lane, Lizz Graves

Certificate in Instructional Techniques – 1st Grade

Pass: Dawn Rose, Matt Catlow, Nikki Bryant, Chris Turner, Sotiris Amman, Elaine Kent, Gemma Ashton, Chris Morrissey

Certificate in Instructional Techniques and Organisation – Graduates

Stevie Braithwaite and Sarah Liddy

Certificate in Techniques of Training Instruction, Judging and Administration – Advanced: Gaynor Gent and Roger Lees.