

RALLY DOG TIMES

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DRAGO AND CHERRY A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN...

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Drago is a Belgian Shepherd Groenendael and resides in KwaZulu Natal. Known as A'Te-El's El Drago of Grundabel, he was born on March 31, 2013, in Sweden. Cherry first spotted

pictures of him as a puppy, and he immediately captured her heart. After connecting with his breeder, Carin Lyrholm, Cherry's dream came true when Drago joined her family. To this day, she has no regrets about bringing him into her life.

Affectionately nicknamed Drags, he was an easy going puppy who quickly adapted to his new home and pack. He warmly welcomes new family members and furry visitors alike. The first major challenge they faced was his initial aversion to car rides, which

Rally Dogs Have More Fun...

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caused him great stress. However, with time and regular travel, he learned to cope, thanks in part to his Great Dane friend, Bella, who helped him see that car trips could be enjoyable, especially when they led to fun outings.

Drago is a gentle and sweet-natured companion. He is a joy to take anywhere and behaves well. He has a special fondness for puppies, and Cherry can always tell when he spots one! He enjoys going to work - training sessions, visiting friends, especially his Great Dane pals, Bella and Meggie, and spending time with his daughter, Astii, who lives across the road. He loves relaxed walks and just chilling.

Cherry tries to avoid crowds with him as he really doesn't feel comfortable when there are a lot of people around him. Drago doesn't take to strangers and generally backs away until he has had a chance to assess any new person. As a result, he found the breed ring stressful. Once he was made up as a Breed Champion, Cherry decided to concentrate on the Dog Sports which he so enjoys. He has achieved CGC Gold, BH and qualified in CD. In obedience he has been competing in C Test and Rally excelled by being the first Rally Champion in KZN. They have had so much fun in the various competitions, and it has been Cherry's privilege to take part with Drago as her partner.

Training has always been about using treats and plenty of positive reinforcement. From a young age, Drago has had a strong desire to please, quickly forming a deep connection with Cherry. She uses high-value treats, primarily liver bread, but viennas are his absolute favourite, to the extent that he can identify and makes a bee-line for people who have them. Making new exercises enjoyable and breaking them down into

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manageable parts has been crucial. Once each segment is mastered, they all come together to create the full picture. Cherry discovered that it's essential to take things slowly and clearly communicate her expectations to Drago. Before introducing something new, she always plans out the commands and hand signals to prevent any confusion. This approach has been particularly important and true in Rally. With all the new and exciting exercises, it is so easy to use the same signals for more than one exercise.

They both have enjoyed all the

challenges and found that Rally really brought FUN back into training and Cherry believes it has brought them closer. Rally has certainly helped with improving Drago's focus on Cherry and his work in general. Cherry attributes this to the big variety of interesting exercises creating a situation where the dog never knows what is coming next.

Cherry: "Remember that there are many ways to teach each exercise to your dog. It's not a case that one size fits all, so if you find that what you are doing is not working, create a new way. Adapt and above all make it FUN."

Competitions can be quite nerve-wracking, but Cherry tries to stay calm since her emotions influence Drago. She believes that maintaining a positive mindset is crucial, and getting energized during warm-ups is key before stepping into the ring. Regardless of how Drago performs, Cherry focuses on the positives and sets aside any areas for improvement to address in their future training sessions. It's vital for both her and Drago that the ring remains a welcoming space. When things don't go as planned, she reflects on her own actions to identify any mistakes. Rally has taught Cherry to keep a positive and cheerful attitude, especially in challenging situations.

When training for Rally, it's crucial to have a solid foundation of basic obedience, ensure that everything is enjoyable, and to stop before the dog becomes bored or frustrated. Ending on a positive note is key. Consistency is vital. For the handler, quickly recognizing and understanding the rally signs can make a significant difference.

Both Cherry and Drago have relished the challenges, and Rally has truly reinvigorated their training sessions, improving their bond. Cherry believes that Rally has significantly enhanced Drago's focus on her and



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his overall performance. She attributes this improvement to the diverse range of engaging exercises that keep him guessing about what's next. Being a Rally mom has been a delightful experience filled with challenges.

The camaraderie and friendships formed among competitors are invaluable. Drago and Cherry would never have achieved as much as we have if it hadn't been for his many followers and friends. The encouragement and help they received from their training buddies Debbie and her Astii are the reason Drago has done as well as he has. Cherry is so grateful to everyone

who has encouraged and helped her very special boy and her on their wonderful journey together.

Although Drago has retired from competing, he is not planning to become a couch potato. They are still going to training sessions but only to do those exercises he truly enjoys. He might even try his paw at Trick Dog, but without any stress involved. Drago will always be Cherry's closest companion, and spending time together remains a vital part of his life, just as it has always been.

Wishing you a fulfilling and active retirement, Drags! We truly appreciate the inspiring example you set for everyone.