

Otis THE Boykin Spaniel

by Magda Fernandez

In the last issue, Pat outlined all the pros and cons of neutering the Boykin male. As mom of an intact Boykin, I know that this choice comes with a great deal of responsibility. Otis and I live in a leafy neighborhood on the outskirts of Boston, which attracts lots of dog owners due to the plentiful greenspace. On a typical day, Otis and I encounter about 20 familiar dogs and 10 unfamiliar ones as we make our rounds through our usual places. Otis tracks 'n treks offleash with me every morning in a nearby vast arboretum before the rangers arrive to enforce the leash laws. At midday we walk onleash at a nearby urban park path, and in the evening we go to a neighborhood field where Otis plays offleash with his dog pals.

Since Otis is intact, my job is to keep him from humping other dogs, fighting with males over a female, and away from intact females. So how do I manage these things? By knowing Otis' level of dominance, training him to obey my commands, keeping him in my sight at all times, getting to know the dogs we encounter regularly, learning how to identify signs of an imminent dog attack, and, finally, knowing what to do in the event of a dogfight.

Knowing who's intact or not is obvious: I simply ask the owner before letting Otis offleash. To keep Otis from humping any dog, I rely on a Dogtra IQ e-collar. I reserve this option when Otis repeatedly tries to hump a dog to relieve himself, and when that dog cannot drive Otis off on his own. In those cases, I intervene with the e-collar to keep Otis from pestering the poor dog. Stopping Otis with positive training didn't work because, for a well-fed dog like him, the drive to hump is stronger than the drive to eat treats. I use the e-collar sparingly, but it does the trick. I sought a trainer who is certified in e-collars to teach me how to use it and determine the right

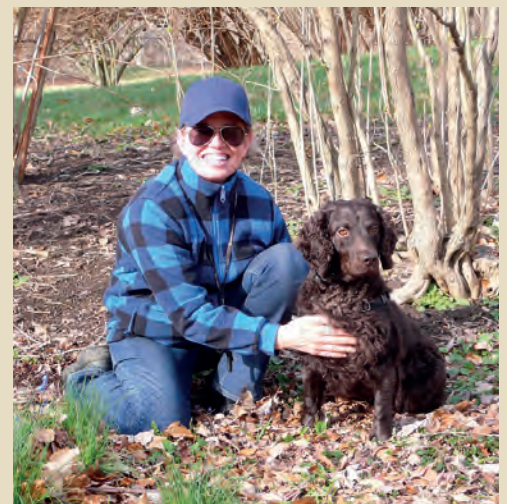
thresholds for Otis. The trick is to use it with the verbal command *Off* as he's about to climb or is on a dog, so that Otis doesn't confuse the correction with pursuing a dog, which is permissible behavior.

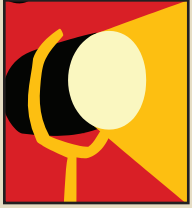
Since Otis defers to dominant dogs in most situations, I don't have to worry about his challenging other males over a female. What I have needed to do, however, is to keep Otis safe from *other* males who have wanted to challenge him because he's intact. I know 3 intact males that go into attack mode whenever they see Otis. Fortunately, their owners are responsible people and *always* leash their boys whenever they see us in the distance. Nevertheless, it's good to learn the types of behaviors that dogs display when signaling an attack. A good primer is Turid Rugaas' *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals*. Not only has this book taught me how to spot the early warnings, it's helped me how to understand Otis' own behavior better. Remarkably, Otis communicates with his body by the book!

Since you always can count on the unexpected, it's also important to know what to do in the event that your dog winds up in a dogfight. Thankfully, we covered that ground extensively in Otis' advanced obedience classes. Although most dog skirmishes start and end really quickly, some require human intervention. That's exactly what happened this January when an intact English Springer pal, who had played with Otis without incident for 2 years, viciously attacked Otis over a spayed female in the group, and would not let go. The Springer's owner, who's a good friend, tried hard to physically remove his dog without success. Remembering my training, I yelled at my friend to do exactly as I was taught: we both repeatedly punched the Springer in the head over and over and over until he finally let go

of Otis. If he hadn't let go, the next step would have been to poke the Springer in the eyes. Thank God, it didn't come to that, but he did bite my ankle several times nevertheless. Miraculously, Otis wound up with a few puncture marks on his ear and neck that only required antibiotics. More importantly, Otis has not shown any sign of lingering trauma. When I recently asked his vet why during his checkup, she surmises this is because Otis feels completely protected by me, his Alpha. By the way, the Springer, who no longer is allowed to play with Otis, also is fine.

You're probably wondering why in the world I don't just neuter Otis and avoid this kind of hassle, especially since I don't plan to breed Otis. To Pat's listed arguments against neutering, I'd like to add one more reason to keep Boykin boys intact: if your Boykin puppy happens to be shy towards other dogs, as Otis was, allowing him a full sexual maturity reduces that shyness considerably. This makes sense because, once the urge to procreate hits, the male wants to approach other dogs more than ever. I socialized Otis a lot as a puppy to overcome his shyness around other dogs, especially since shyness can lead to fear aggression. But nothing worked like his full transition into adulthood. It was like a magic switch!





Spotlight on ...

Hunting with Hollow Creek's "Chief" in the orange collar and Hollow Creek's "Renegade" in green. Owner Scottie Murray of Yulee, FL with grandson Tristan.

