

Take Your Dog on a Bike Ride

Healthy dogs need exercise, and a walk simply isn't aerobic enough for most of them.

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As you progress, teach your dog slow, fast, right, left and stop. Once you are on the bike, you will have only your voice to guide and control your dog, so start teaching a vocabulary right away. Walk at a normal pace with the bike between you and your dog. Change pace, turn corners, and weave back and forth. If your dog becomes distracted, call its attention back to you. If it pays attention, offer enthusiastic praise.

When your dog attentively follows you as you walk the bike, add more distractions. Walk the bike over the curb a few times. Walk over grass, concrete, asphalt, dirt and gravel. Shake the bike so it rattles as much as it would over a bumpy surface. When your dog seems comfortable, hook it up to the bike and repeat training.

Don't rush, even if it seems as if you are being overly cautious. Once you are riding the bike, you will have only verbal control over your dog, and if it panics, you both could be in trouble. It is much safer to face potential problems while your feet are still on the ground, so take your time. When your dog can handle all these challenges, fasten its leash and mount your bike.

Start slowly to allow your dog to get used to your being on the bike. Use verbal commands to guide it, and, if it gets too excited, teach it "Easy!" and use your brakes to slow the dog. Before going for an exercise ride, take several short rides in a safe place to teach your dog the skills it learned when you were walking. When you are satisfied with its skills, take it for a short run alongside your bike.

You need to build the dog's fitness gradually as you would your own. Start with a ride around two or three blocks at a comfortable jogging speed for your dog. Gradually increase the distance of your rides, keeping a comfortable jogging speed. As your dog becomes more fit - over several months - you also can increase the speed.

Keep in mind canine athletes can develop sore muscles just as humans can. If your dog appears to be stiff and sore, a massage can loosen those muscles. Have your dog lie on the floor. Sit or kneel behind the dog and, starting at its head and neck, gently massage the muscles. As the dog relaxes, work down its neck to the shoulders and legs, and continue to its hips. If your dog falls asleep during the massage, wonderful. If your dog hasn't had a massage before, keep it gentle.