

## Dog Actors Strut Their Stuff in 'Firehouse Dog'

**A behind-the-scenes look at the new family flick, “Firehouse Dog,” and the dog actors who portray “Rex.”**

*Kelly Rae Hickman*

Posted: April 2, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Life can't get any better when it involves designer duds, sparkling diamonds, five-star accommodations and bone-a-fide brown-nosing from personal assistants and the like – especially when you're a dog!

In “Firehouse Dog,” a new film from Twentieth Century Fox, Irish Terrier Rex is Tinseltown's top-grossing doggie actor. For him, constant pampering, plus rest and relaxation, are routine, until an on-set accident leaves the canine star's life in limbo.

After surviving a commercial shoot gone wrong, Rex finds himself lost in an unfamiliar city because his handlers think he's dead. So he seeks refuge in an abandoned loft. But his hideaway literally goes up in smoke when a fire breaks out, leaving him trapped on the burning roof. City firefighters – from the station appropriately named “Dogpatch” – rush to the scene, led by fire captain Connor (Bruce Greenwood of “Eight Below”).

With his life on the line, Rex gets back into character, taking a death-defying leap to escape the burning blaze. No wonder they pay him the big bucks! Rex's stunt-dog skills earn him a gig as Dogpatch's official mascot, assisting firefighters during rescue calls.

Soon, the Dogpatch station and Rex become local heroes – drawing plenty of media attention, including Rex's former handlers who want nothing more than to get their Hollywood hound back to work.

Considering what a professional Rex is, audiences would never guess that the actual doggie actors who portray Rex in the film have never worked on a movie before.

“It's their big-screen debut,” muses Ursula Brauner of Boone's Animals for Hollywood in Castaic, Calif., head animal trainer and coordinator for “Firehouse Dog.” “None of the dogs had any official training before their work with us began.”

Brauner's training team included Devon Evans, David Allsberry and Shawn Weber, who enlisted four dogs: 5-year-old Stryder, 3-year-old Arwen, 1-year-old Frodo, and 2-year-old Rohan, to work on the movie.

“We started working with the dogs approximately three months before we started filming,” Brauner explains. “The first six weeks we trained at our ranch, and the rest was on location in Toronto, Canada. In Toronto we worked with the actors, stunt coordinator, on the sets, and with wardrobe and props.”

Any dog owner can attest that trying to teach your pooch a trick or two can be quite a task, but imagine having to train four dogs to do tricks for a movie, where distractions run the gamut, including camera crews and actors, sets and equipment.

“A huge part of our training before we go to camera is getting the dogs used to all the chaos and equipment that is present on any movie set,” Brauner says. “We practice for weeks with cameras, dolly tracks, sound booms and so on. This ensures that when the cameras start rolling, the dogs completely ignore all this. It wouldn't make a very good film if the dog is always looking at the camera or watching other crew members off camera doing their jobs.”

Brauner and crew enjoyed their six-week, eight-hour-a-day filming schedule, which brought the team closer together.

“The trainers and dogs are a team, and nothing forms a stronger bond,” Brauner says.

But don't get too starstruck. In anticipation of the film's release this Wednesday, the American Kennel Club and the Irish Terrier Club of America remind that potential puppy owners should carefully research a breed when buying a dog and should only buy from a reputable source.

They teamed up with Twentieth Century Fox to create a public service announcement reminding people about the importance of making educated decisions when adding a dog to their home, according to the AKC. A video of the



"Firehouse Dog" announcement featuring several of the film's stars is available online at [www.akc.org/press\\_center/advertising.cfm](http://www.akc.org/press_center/advertising.cfm).

You can catch Rex's adventure when "Firehouse Dog" hits theaters on April 4. For more information, check out [www.firehousedogmovie.com](http://www.firehousedogmovie.com).