

# The Times

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# Best behaved dog trains in Redwood City

By PAT BUTORAC  
Times Staff Writer

REDWOOD CITY — The front door opens and Tess, a 4-year-old golden retriever, jumps up and plants her paws flat on the visitor's coat.

The dog may not act like the best behaved dog in the nation, but she is and she proved it this weekend.

Tess placed first above 189 dogs representing 38 breeds in the 10th annual Gaines Classic of Dog Obedience, a contest that for canines combines the athletic skills of the Olympic games with the good manners spelled out by Emily Post.

It was a first in a lot of other ways, according to contest officials at Gaines headquarters in New York. It was the first time a winner has come from California. Tess became the youngest dog to win, and her owner, 22-year-old Dee Dee Anderson, of Redwood City, became the youngest trainer to receive what is considered by many to be the most prestigious award of its kind.

What impresses Anderson the most about Tess is the absolute cool of the strawberry blonde pooch.

"She performs well under pressure. She had to be close to perfect. That means she couldn't scratch, bark, shift position or look around," Anderson said.

Judges at the Long Beach Convention Center gave Tess a score of 197.667 out of a possible 200 in an event known as the Super Dog Division.

The test brought Tess and her trainer instant nationwide fame. They've been on network news shows, and David Letterman has asked the winning team to become guests on his talk show.

What Tess did perfectly in front of an audience of 2,500 people was fetch, jump hurdles, walk a perfect "figure eight," and identify a leather leash and a metal dumb bell that her owner handled out of 10 other identical objects.

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Times Photo by Mike Russell

Dee Dee Anderson hugs the ever-obedient Tess



# Dog

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"That was the toughest," Anderson said. "It's very hard to train a dog to use its nose."

Tess also obeys her owner's subtle hand commands to sit, heel, lie down, and change directions with two delicate hops.

Tess' alert and instantaneous reactions to the silent commands are enough to bring tears to the eyes of a dog owner who has tried unsuccessfully to train a pet simply to stay off a couch.

The key to Tess' effective training is a consistent but gentle approach.

"Her rewards are praise and toys," Anderson said.

Training was relatively easy because the dog "loves to work. She loves people, and she'll do anything for me."

Tess, a veteran of the dog obedience stage circuit, has competed in 58 contests this year in several western states and Canada — taking first place in half of them. On stage, she has a ballerina's instinct and finishes each performance in perfect position directly in front of or directly to the side of Anderson. An inch or two out of position costs points.

However, when Tess is not performing, she acts just like any other dog. With her sidekick, Nugget, a 6-year-old golden retriever, Tess runs through the house, brings gnawed and saliva-soaked toys to anyone who might be up for a game of fetch, and then careens into walls and furniture in pursuit of the flying toys.

Anderson has been training dogs for eight years, using an almost soft-spoken approach. She fell into it by accident.

"My father brought home a St.

Bernard-huskie when I was 14-years-old. One of the first things the dog did was get up on the table and eat our dinner before we noticed what had happened. Someone had to train him, so I did it," she said.

She purchased Tess with a friend for \$400 when the dog was just 8-weeks-old. The dog, which had already proven that she had star quality when she was tested as a puppy, had been flown here from Massachusetts. Her California owners planned to train her to follow in the pawprints of her father, a national champion in field and hunting dog contests. But the owners sold her when the dog proved she could climb or dig her way out of any confined situation.

"She was an escape artist at the age of 8 weeks," Anderson said.

Anderson doesn't know what Tess' sale price would be now, but it's a moot point since she has no intention of letting her go. A prospective buyer offered \$3,000 for Tess when the dog was just 8 months old, before she started her career.

Tess has had one litter, and her next brood will bring in as much as \$500 a puppy. Anderson said that will just defray the \$3,000 cost she and her husband, Bill, an electronics worker, have tallied up traveling the performance circuit this past year in a worn out van.

Anderson, who now works full-time training dogs, said patience and a good relationship between pet and owner are the keys to changing a dog's behavior.

"A lot of people don't realize that you can train a dog to do something in a week, but it takes months of repeated trainings before the dog remembers to do it consistently," she said.