

'Good Guys' carting dogs in Schomberg

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You won't see this on the *Dog Whisperer*.

In fact, if you even mention the American TV dog-training star in their presence, they may scoff at you.

Carol Ralston and Jan Kay, two experienced dog trainers from Schomberg, don't do obedience training — they do cart training.

Also known as draft work, the art of carting with your dog is precisely what it sounds like. It is a dog sport in which a dog (usually a large breed) pulls a cart, which can be used for a variety of purposes such as gardening and yard work, getting supplies into hard to reach places, or giving children rides just for fun, among many others.

"If you have a carting dog on your block, you're really popular," said Kay jokingly, adding that she promised the little boy on her block a ride for his birthday.

The unique team run a group called, The Good Guys Carting Dogs, which takes a group of several dogs, and their owners, each year and trains them on the tenants of carting over the course of eight weeks. The class takes place at Ralston's home in Schomberg every Monday night.

Once the dogs are trained, members of the group also travel around to various events throughout the region giving children rides to help raise money for charity. The fundraising events also help to show that dogs with responsible owners can be contributing members of a community.

The dogs have been used in parades and birthday parties, the smaller dogs can be used for

visitations at seniors homes, or for practical around the house purposes, such as helping to cart garbage down a long rural driveway.

But it's not just about fun for the duo.

"It takes work and it takes time," said Kay referring to the training schedule they have their students on (both of the canine and human variety).

While many dog breeds have historically had different functions for and have been used for carting — i.e. Bernese for hauling milk through town or Bouviers as the 'beer dogs' — Ralston and Kay are cognizant of how easy it could be to abuse the safety of the animals.

Although they teach the course in eight weeks, they make sure the owners don't have an expectation that their dog will be pulling a cart at the end of it.

"Our goal is to have the dog be happy to pull a cart whenever that time should come," said Kay.

When both Ralston and Kay started off training their own dogs to cart, they were part of an all Newfoundland club in the early 1980s.

Even back then, philanthropy was part of their mission.

As part of the club, they would take their abnormally large dogs to carnivals and take Polaroid photos with kids to help raise money for charities. However, the two didn't see why the club needed to be limited to Newfoundland breeds — they wanted to open up carting to "all sizes, shapes and forms" of dogs, said Kay.

"We took a lot of static and still take a lot of static for that," said Kay referring to many owners who don't see a purpose



for teaching small dogs to pull a cart.

"Any dog can do it as long as the human goes about it the right way."

Despite critiques from other large dog owners, the two have proven that it's not just size that counts after all.

They two have trained a variety of dogs, ranging in size, over their years together. The key, they said, is to teach the humans how to read their own dog and pay attention to their signs.

But, teaching dogs new tricks is fulfilling for both self-proclaimed animal lovers.

"It's just great to see them succeed," said Ralston. "It's so nice when you see the smile on the handlers face when the dog pulls for the first time and its tail is wagging."

"I can't imagine not having this in my life," said Kay.



The Good Guys Carting Dogs club in Schomberg holds dog carting lessons for eight weeks every spring. Dog carting, also known as drafting, is a dog sport in which a dog (usually a large breed) learns to pull a cart behind them. Carting can be used for a variety of purposes such as gardening and yard work, getting supplies into hard to reach places, or giving children rides just for fun, among many other things.

From top left: Georgina Cornell gets a kiss from her award-winning three-year-old Bernese Mountain Dog, Dynio; Judy Witkowski holds on tight to her three-year-old Black Russian Terrier, Bods; Anna-Marie Christensen teaches her Loonberger, Olie, to listen to her prompts.
photos by Terra Cioffe