

# TRANSFORMATION FROM CONFORMATION TO QUALIFICATION WITH OUR AFFENPINSCHERS

by KEN STOWELL

**W**e are new to the Affenpinscher breed. Our first Affenpinscher, Tamarin Technique, aka “Tech” was our introduction to Affenpinschers. A few months later, his daughter, Tamarin Tease, aka “Ditto” arrived.

After finishing both of them, we felt there must be something more we could do beyond the Conformation ring. Our good friend, Teresa Solomon of Georgia (whom I met by chance in California 2006), her Chihuahua was a top 5 invitee for the Eukanuba Invitational Agility Trial, suggested we look into Obedience, Rally and possibly Agility. I took her advice.

I contacted the AKC and they were very helpful and informative, so, of course, I ordered the Rules and Regulations handbooks.

It was decided Tech would attend an 8-week Basic Obedience Class offered at the Upper Suncoast Dog Training Center. First day of school was

September 29, 2014. I quickly realized our 2 years of bonding during Conformation put us ahead of the curve, as far as a working team was concerned.

We began to compete, and yes, we did have our moments. The Conformation dog now had to “sit in the heel” when we stopped and continue “in the heel” while walking. “In the heel” simply means the dog’s head or shoulder is parallel to the handler’s left leg. Tech was a natural and learned quickly what was expected of him. Soon we were training off lead.

I had to learn quickly, too. Not just the rules and regulations, but the procedures and policies of the course and terminology of the sport. Our debut November 29, 2014, entered in Rally Novice A, I learned a very important lesson: do not stare at your dog while competing in Rally to see where he is or you will miss a sign. I did. We were disqualified. I thought to myself, ‘Nice start in a new sport.’ It was a humbling experience.

In Performance, handlers have the opportunity to walk the course without their dogs to get the layout of the signs, the course and to ask the judge for an explanation of a particular sign. I do this every time. In Obedience, the first rule of thumb is you cannot talk to your dog with the exception of a few commands. After ten years of showing Chihuahuas, which I still do, that rule was, and still is, very difficult. I constantly have to remind myself to keep my mouth shut. And if I don’t remember, the judge will remind me.

During Tech’s training and course runs, we decided to give Ditto a try. We enrolled her in the Basic Obedience class on July 13, 2015. She continued to work in Conformation towards her Grand Champion title and her placement in the Owner Handled series for the AKC Eukanuba Finals.

Our initial concern was will she be able to distinguish between the two competitions. Each sport is different in that Conformation is a show lead



Tech (Illustration by Elizabeth Dolezal at DolezalArt.com)



Ditto (Illustration by Elizabeth Dolezal at DolezalArt.com)

and Performance is a traditional buckle collar and leash. She does distinguish between the two by the collar or lead she has on.

Once again, our bonding in Conformation paid off as well as my own experience in the training ring. To our amazement, she too, quickly picked up on the training regimen.

To title in Obedience and Rally you need to qualify in 3 “legs” by 2 different judges. Obedience, earn more than 50 percent of points for each exercise with a total score of at least 170 out of 200 points. Rally, 70 out of 100 points.

Ditto’s debut in Rally Novice B was September 12, 2015 at the Toy Dog Club of Central Florida. She qualified with a score of 84.0 and placed third.

Tech and Ditto are different in training, and course runs, as night and day. Tech is very good at heeling on and off lead. Ditto will drift a little too much. Their long sit (1 minute) and long downs (3 minutes) are carbon copies. They have never popped up during these exercises. During recall exercises, Tech will come to me in regal style with his Affenpinscher jaunt, whereas Ditto will run towards me like she stole something—flat out and low to the ground. Sometimes I think that she’s going to run right past me and I have to keep my mouth shut! She always gets a round of applause and a round of sporting laughter.

We have learned much about our Affenpinschers. First and foremost, they are smart, smart, smart. Keenly aware and eager to please. We do our very best to nurture these

wonderful traits. It does not matter if the dog is pure-bred or mixed, the bonds I’ve witnessed between humans and their canine friends are very apparent during training and in the ring. Not only do the dogs want to please their owners, the owners want to please their dogs.

Rally and Obedience is truly a team sport. In Conformation, the steward will call, “Long Coat Chihuahua so and so”. In Performance, the judge will call out, “Team Affenpinscher so and so.” In Conformation it’s you, your dog and everybody else’s dog that is being judged by a written standard as interpreted by a ring judge, and that’s all good. In Performance, it’s you, your dog and a stopwatch being observed by a judge that personally laid out the course. The stopwatch only comes into play to break a point tie as it applies to Rally and Obedience. In other words, you were good, but how fast were you good?

I try to video most of their training to see what’s broken, so I can correct the problems during the week between classes. Personally I have so much fun doing this and it amazes me that I can learn an exercise and pass that on to my dogs, but again, they are smart. You can actually see their individual progress with learning and their ability to retain more and more. I truly believe they have fun too.

Our future plan for Tech is continue his training and competition in Rally, Obedience and Conformation. We are slowly adding jumps and weave poles. He has his own mini Agility course

in the backyard. He will continue his role as Therapy Dog visiting patients in nursing homes and private doctor offices. His loving demeanor is beautiful to watch.

Ditto, she will continue Rally, Obedience and Conformation, but plan to start Barn Hunt classes in a few months. We want to put her high drive and natural born curiosity to work. It should be interesting.

I want to thank the instructors at the Upper Suncoast Training Center in Clearwater, Florida; Teresa Solomon who has answered a million questions with honest answers; the spectators who love to see the “monkey dogs” in the ring; and all the comments and questions that range from “What kind of dog is that?” to “Is that a Griffon?” to “I’ve only seen them in pictures or on TV.” A sincere and heartfelt thank you to Jackie Stacy and Terry Stacy of Tamarin Kennels, Reg. who have entrusted us with their line of Affenpinschers and who continue to guide us, teach us and support us. Thank you to my wife Alison, who is a self prescribed behind-the-scenes participant. In truth, she holds us all together. Absolutely none of this would have been possible without her.

Last but not least, thank you to CH Tamarin Technique CD BN RE THDN CGCA CGCU and his daughter GCH CH Tamarin Tease BN RN CGCA CGCU— they make me look good. ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Ken Stowell retired from the US Navy. As a corpsman he has served with the Marines and various Aviation Squadrons. His specialties included Aerospace Medicine and Aerospace Physiology. He retired off the USS Daniel Boone (SSBN-629). He holds degrees in Cultural Anthropology and Archaeology.*

