

## Even a Laid Back, Pensive Dog Has Makings of a Champion

Pritamo Kentala

*(Editors Note: I noticed a post on the Agiledogs list about Pritamo Kentalo of Washington state and her mini rescue dog Zita earning the last Gamble leg needed for their USDAA Agility Dog Champion title (ADCH) last month. I contacted Pritamo by e-mail and simply inquired "I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your new ADCH dog?" Following was her response. I think it makes for a pretty interesting and inspiring read.)*



Zita with sun on her face as she soars over a hurdle somewhere on her way to becoming a double champion.

She was adopted from Seattle Animal Control in 1993. She had been picked up as a stray (in raging heat) and was not claimed by her owners. I don't know why I took her, it was a heart connection, as I was not allowed to take her out of the cage and play with her or even touch her until the day I took her home. I talked to her through the cage door and fed her treats through the wire. I went home and thought about her and went back the next day to make it official.

They guessed her age at about one and a half years (but they ALWAYS say that I have found!) and they thought she had already had one litter previously. This dog was so filthy dirty, that I convinced the Animal Control officer to allow her a "cinderella day pass" to be bathed BEFORE they spayed her. I brought a size 100 crate, opened the kennel door, stuffed her in the crate and drove her to the groomers. She was FULL of fleas. The groomer took her and put her in one sink, took the crate to another sink and cleaned it with steaming hot water. Then he started working on her with flea soap and a comb - what a mess! He said she probably had never been groomed in her life. Then, I took her back to the pound and they were nice enough to put her in her own run with an actual blanket to lie on (no blanket in the previous run). This was a Saturday, she had to stay 'till she was spayed on Monday, and I picked her up on Tuesday.

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I took her to my vet and she had lots of superficial problems; ear infection, eye infection, dry-ucky skin, tape worms, I can't remember what else! But with two weeks of meds, good food and brushing, her condition improved dramatically.

She was not housebroken, did not even know "sit". I guessed she had been a backyard dog that didn't cause much trouble (she is very quiet and pensive), and was easy to ignore. I remember teaching her to "sit." You could see the gears turning in her brain as if she were thinking, "Okay, now how does this go? She makes this sound, and then I am supposed to do something.... now what was it I have to do to get the cookie?" It was amazing. She is a very sweet, low drive dog and it takes her awhile to put two and two together.





I was going to name her Rose as in “second hand rose” but then I found out that “Zita” (pronounced zee-ta) is the short form of Rosita and decided on that instead. I found myself walking around the house frequently singing “Zita Zita Bo Bit a Fe Fi Mo Mita Zita!” (If you are old enough to remember a song called “the name game” you’ll recognize where that came from). When it came time to register her, I decided that would be her official name. (If all those purebred dogs can have those long fancy names, I figured she should too!).

Zita did not know how to play at all and over the years I have watched the layers peel away and seen the more lively, imaginative, funny side of her emerge. It is a process that will never end I am sure. She is always careful. She is the one dog that I ASK to come and jump up on me for attention.

In agility training, toys were useless. I used lots of praise, food, and encouragement. Her training sessions are kept very short and I try to use table scraps or something very tempting as treats each time. We were finally able to achieve gambles by introducing a food tube to give her something to chase. Targets were great to give her a place to focus on and go towards but they don’t move and will be there waiting for you whether you walk or trot towards them. The food tube created more drive and she picked up speed and a little excitement about getting to where I was sending her more quickly.

It took YEARS to get a fast drop on the table. Zita always just had to settle herself before going down. I introduced the clicker and lots of table “games” to eventually get a fast drop and shave a few seconds off of our course times. Time has always been a problem and we had many, many clean runs in USDAA Masters that were .50 or .10 seconds over time.

Every summer I train with Sharon Nelson and she helped me tremendously over the years to figure out new ways to motivate Zita and build her confidence. She is



Pritamo Kentala with her new Agility Dog Champion<sup>SM</sup> Zita, who she always described as a “pound puppy” on her event entries, posing at the Rainier Agility Team trial with judge Kenneth Tatsch. Tatsch presided over the duo in the final Gamblers run they needed to complete the USDAA championship title. In addition to her ADCH, Zita previously earned her NADAC Championship (NATCH) title.

the type of dog that will freeze if she thinks she has made a mistake. Better to not move than to screw anything else up, she reasons! Zita never threw in the towel, though, she always wanted to play with me and that is what eventually led to our success.

When Suzanne Clothier met her, she had a very insightful comment. She said, if Zita were a small child, while everyone else was outside playing “horsey”, she would be up in her room either writing poetry or playing with her stamp collection! I almost fell over when she said that, because it was right on target. While the other dogs run and play and chase balls, Zita will sit on the side of the hill in the sun, with the wind in her face and just watch... I call her my “Zen dog”!

I have learned an awful lot about training from her. She is a loyal and devoted companion and has given me one hundred percent of herself in the agility ring. I never really thought we would get this far, however, I never did give up either! Luckily, Zita didn’t give up either. Now, the dog they told me at Animal Control would not be a good agility dog (not that they knew what it was in 1993), is a NATCH and an ADCH, and I couldn’t be more proud.



Zita barrels out of the tunnel.