

### Royal Guide Dogs for the Blind by Jenny Stirzaker

Guide dogs are specially bred and trained to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to achieve independence and enjoy equal rights and responsibilities. Throughout the world, the preferred breed for a guide dog is the Labrador. The Labrador is a responsive, intelligent and placid dog that learns quickly.

The following is an interview that we conducted with one of our clients Michael, who has a guide dog named Finn. Michael and Finn often visit us here at Weston Creek Veterinary Hospital, finding that Finn's nose will often get him into trouble with all the fantastic smells in the hospital.

#### How did Finn help you out during the 2003 Bushfires?

When the fires came and there was only one way left out of the suburb, we were requested to evacuate by the police. Finn took me out through the mayhem of the fires, explosions, helicopters, etc straight to the car without hesitation, a fantastic feat. After the fires Finn was nominated for, and received, a "Certificate of Recognition" from the ACT Chief Minister for his heroic actions. My Guide Dog instructor rated him a 14 out of 10 for his actions on that day.

#### How long will Finn stay with you?

There is no set time for Finn to retire from guiding. However, it is usually 10 or 11 years or even possibly a little longer. It all depends on his health and his ability to guide. After his retirement Finn will be staying with me as there is no way we will ever part.

#### Do you have to do any training revision with Finn? If so, what types of activities or exercises do you both do?

Yes. Once you have a Guide Dog there is really no end to the training. New techniques are always cropping up. Finn has had a little remedial training several times because his nose gets him into trouble! And, on one occasion because he was "off with the pixies" he walked me into a wall! However, after a little heart-to-heart conversation with him we tried again and he performed the task perfectly.

Thank you for your time Michael and Finn!



#### How did Finn come to you?

I applied to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT to be considered for and to see if I was eligible to have a Guide Dog. Thankfully I passed. After waiting over six months I was introduced to Finn. We bonded immediately and he has been my friend and Guide since then.

#### How long have you had Finn?

I have had Finn for six years – since 19 March 2001.

#### How does Finn help you with your day to day activities?

Finn is my eyes and my unerring guide. Finn is able to lead me through a myriad of obstacles. He has no trouble finding important things such as doors, taking me round obstacles, finding the toilet, crossing roads and difficult open space crossings. I am totally blind and depend on him completely.

#### What kind of personality does Finn have?

#### Does he get up to mischief like most Labradors?

Finn has a wonderful laid-back nature and is very, very, friendly. He thinks everyone is going to say "hello"! However, most times this does not encroach on his working ability. While Finn is working he is the picture of obedience and confidence. However, when he is not on duty he is like any other Labrador. To receive attention he sometimes jumps up on the lounge or on to the bed. He has also started digging holes in the backyard over the last couple of months. But if I issue him a command Finn is at my side and ready to have his harness put on and ready to work.

#### Opening Hours

Monday-Friday 8am-6.15pm

Saturday 8am-5pm

Sunday 9am-5pm (Closed 12.30-1.30pm)

All consultations by appointment.  
Phone 62884944

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## Keeping Warm in Winter by Jenny Stirzaker

Well, it's that time of the year again and all the animals are starting to feel the winter chill. There are a few options of how to keep your creature warm this winter.

A few ideas are:

- If you have a dog or cat that spends most of its time outdoors, try keeping their bed or kennel in a sheltered area so the weather can't get in.
- If your animal lives indoors, make sure that their bed is free from cold draughts, sometimes a piece of carpet underneath their bed will help keep the cold from coming up through the tiles.
- Small dogs and cats sometimes appreciate a heat mat. There are heat mats on the market which can be either warmed up in the microwave or plugged into the wall.
- There is a huge range of jackets and jumpers for both dogs and cats. They range in price and also come in many different sorts of fabrics including waterproof.

Keeping your pet warm means a happy pet, also preventing stiffness and your pet from becoming unwell. If your pet has arthritis, the cold can aggravate the problem and sometimes may require them to see a vet for medication.

Here at Weston Creek Veterinary Hospital, we are happy to fit your animal with a snuggly jacket or order in a heat mat to keep away the winter blues.

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## Noise Phobias: Fireworks by Dr Doris Beck

Despite many efforts over the past years, fireworks are still legally on sale in the ACT and as the last Queen's Birthday weekend demonstrated, this means not just a night or two of distress but in many cases up to 2 weeks of suffering for pets as many people do not obey the restrictions issued by the government.

Noise phobias are amongst the most common behavioural problems for dogs. In many cases these phobias are not learned, that is they have become associated with being unpleasant because the pet has been hurt. Many dogs are born phobic of fireworks but do not show signs until the first time they experience the noise. However, repeated exposure to such events, generally make the problem worse.

Symptoms your pet may show vary from hiding and quivering, to frantic running and barking, or in extreme cases escape behaviours such as biting through doors and fences that lead to injury and property damage. If your pet escapes, all too often they are hit by cars and killed or seriously injured.

So what can you do?

First of all confine your pet indoors, to reduce the level of noise. Sometimes having background noise such as the TV or radio may also help. Allow your pet to choose an area they find more comfortable, this maybe under the bed or dining room table. Make as little fuss over them as possible and be as cheerful as you can, to show them that you are not concerned.

You may also help your pet by using a special pheromone diffuser (DAP Diffuser) that helps your pet to stay calm. These are available through vets and can be plugged into a power point, in the area your pet is kept. Ideally these are plugged in as soon as the first fireworks start, usually the week prior to the long weekend, and stay on until a week or two after the long weekend.

In more serious cases it may be necessary to use medication to reduce anxiety. As these medications, such as xanax and valium, can have variable effects on pets, it is usually best to trial these well in advance of expected fireworks, so that an effective dosage

can be established.

Medications such as these do not heavily sedate your pet, but reduce anxiety and in some cases also interfere with memory so events are not remembered. Sedatives such as ACP, are also commonly prescribed, and while these sedate your pet and avoid injury, unfortunately they also sensitise to noise. This means your pet will still be in distress, but unable to respond due to the sedative effects.

Hopefully in the future, firework sales will be banned in the ACT and the pets of Canberra can learn to enjoy the Queen's Birthday weekend with their owners.

