

Love, fetch and obey

Training a dog to obey its owner could be likened to raising a child. For Berwick Obedience Club member Debbie Charters, it all comes down to building a loving relationship with your dog. DANIELLE BUTCHER reports.

ON the first Saturday of the month, things can be a little crazy at the Berwick Dog Obedience Club.

That's the day when new, and generally out-of-control dogs are welcomed to the sessions.

The basic obedience sessions aim to teach owners how to control their dogs on the lead, including getting them to sit, stay and heel on command.

Club member and trainer Debbie Charters can still remember her first obedience training session more than 20 years ago.

Looking around at the advanced dogs, she found it hard to see Kelly, her newly adopted Dobermann, reaching that level of control.

"When you first join obedience classes the dogs don't know how to stand still. You look around at the competition dogs and think, My dog could never do that."

Kelly had wandered into the Chamber's backyard and would have been put down if the couple had not decided to adopt her.

"I had always wanted a dog but I wanted a little fluffball and then we ended up with a Dobermann on our doorstep.

"Because of our own preconceived ideas [about Dobermanns], I decided we better go to obedience training."

Now on her fourth Dobermann, Debbie says she fell in love with the competition.

"I had never been into sport, so it was an outlet for me where I could make new friends and get outdoors."

She says good obedience skills requires trust between the dog and owner.

"Dogs are such social animals, they love company. You need to bond with your dog and find something special

"If you bond and they really adore you then you can get a lot out of them."

Debbie says any breed of dog can join the sessions.

"Some breeds will obviously pick it up easier than the others, but they can all do it. You just need to find that niche that works for that dog.

"The dogs love the competition too.



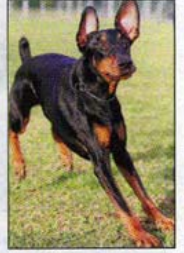
'The dogs love the competition too. It is making them use their brains and they are very clever animals.'

It is making them use their brains and they are very clever animals. And it is very special time with their owners."

She says the Berwick club is very strong on rewarding dogs' good behaviour rather than punishing them when they do something wrong.

"We are always using food rewards, pats and toys; you will very rarely see people pulling on leads."

The club meets every Saturday, 11am-4pm, at Kalora Park Reserve, McKenzie Lane, Narre Warren North. Details: 97969496 or www.berwickode.asn.au



Top: Chase tests his skills in retrieval. Left: Chase, 5, is Debbie Chambers' fourth Dobermann. She is now hooked on obedience training and competition. Pictures: Melissa Banks