

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

Positively Shocking

Recently a neighbor installed an electric fence. It seemed a better solution than her previous method of pet management, confining the dogs in 8 x 10 pens. I would watch her younger son dutifully trudging the dogs around the property on lead but it was rare to see these dogs having a frolicsome pen-free dog day. Well, good. Now they can have some freedom, I thought.

I hadn't given the matter any more consideration until I chose to walk the Bea that direction on one of our afternoon constitutionals. The Bea, who is almost completely deaf, was absorbed in her mission du jour, inhaling and analyzing every available scent, and wasn't cognizant that the e-fence dogs even existed. However, I was fully aware that we were about to have an incident as the dogs bound top speed and screaming off their porch and headed our direction. After all, that's their job: intruder alert, protect their turf.

Having trained many client dogs to the correct appreciation of an electric fence, I knew from their speed and their intent, that they were going to hit the perimeter, get shocked and at very least, cross outside their zone. I called out the "stop!" command I use for e-fence training, but it was too late. Both dogs were shocked, one dog charged through onto the road. The end result was that the escapee was captured and returned to the yard and I received a tongue-lashing from the owner for having the effrontery to walk my dog past their house.

The main benefit of electric fences is that they are, indeed, invisible and do not mar the landscape. They are also less costly and less labor intensive than installing a solid physical fence especially if you want to delineate a large area. In my kennel days I had seven acres defined by e-fence. (Wire is cheap.) The other benefit is that when used properly, they are an extremely good solution to pet containment.

The down side is what can happen to the dogs. E-fences rely on the transmission of a radio signal from a wire or other transmitter. The signal is broadcast within a specific zone. The dog wears a battery-operated receiver on a special collar that picks up the signal when the dog enters the zone. The better systems are programmed to emit a "warning tone" (at the trainer flags, usually) when the dog approaches the transmission area. If he remains or travels further into the zone, he's hit with a shock, or aversion stimulus.

Unfortunately, many owners skip this very important step of e-fence ownership and do not train their pets to stop when they hear the warning tone. It is extremely easy to do, dogs learn the lesson quickly but it takes time, usually 2-3

short training sessions a day, for a week. I trained all three of my dogs to respect the warning tone and in 12 years never had a run-through or shock incident. That is, not to say, however, that I never had an escape.

Every morning when I would let the dogs out to “air”, the Bea would head to the same spot at the corner of the yard, cock her head so her receiver had a clear shot at the signal, and pause. If she heard the warning tone she would shrug and continue on her morning patrol. If the power was out or her battery dead, off she would go for a play day in the wilds of rural Vermont. When I asked the e-fence salesman what one does if the power goes out, he replied, “Don’t tell your dog.” Well.

Unfortunately, some dogs seem to have no trouble braving the strong corrections imposed on them by a working collar with fresh batteries if they are presented with sufficiently enticing stimuli: a female in season, a fast-moving cat, a child on a bicycle or a middle-aged woman with an elderly beagle.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog. She is a holistic behavior coach, a canine massage therapist (CMT), herbalist, and canine homeopath. Want more information? Have a question? Send a note to Tracie at letstalk@wholedog.biz or visit www.wholedog.biz.

