



## Adventures in flyball

by Christine Swan

Two teams of excited, barking dogs enter the racing area. Intense Border Collies and struggling terriers and, what is that tall, leggy dog bouncing among them? Yes, it is a Saluki having the time of her life!

I have been involved with flyball for over 20 years, so when 'Cowboy' (Sandstorm Raindeer Games) came into our lives, it only seemed natural that she would compete in this addictive sport.

I knew that the lessons Cowboy learned in puppyhood would be crucial to her success later on. Thus, I raised her with flyball in mind.

I wanted her to place a high value on toy and food rewards. We played lots of games with a variety of

toys. Tug of war, chasing a toy on a string (so I can maintain control!) and hide-and-seek games helped her to build a strong drive to interact with me. I was always careful to end the game while she was still keen to play to help increase her desire for the next session. I wanted her to be eager to "work" for food rewards. We did a lot of "hand feeding," asking and luring for simple behaviours, marking them with the word "yes," then rewarding.

She attended flyball team practices and tournaments to get her used to the noise and speed of the adult dogs racing. We did restrained recalls to a tug toy, and worked hard on front paw targets to ensure a great "box turn."

Cowboy's early training has really paid off. She will be turning seven this November and is still extremely eager to "work," and very much believes that the best fun revolves around games with humans. She is a very honest dog to work with. If something is not flowing or progressing well in our training, I immediately stop, analyze and try something different. She certainly has made me a very creative trainer, trying out many new methods and ideas.

Many, many years ago, I watched Pam Reid's Saluki, Shahiin, become the first Flyball Champion Saluki in North America. He was a beautiful boy and he was my inspiration for wanting a Saluki. Cowboy is the second Saluki to obtain a Flyball Championship and the first to achieve the Flyball Master title awarded by the North American Flyball Association.

I believe that keeping your expectations high, and setting a solid foundation of positive, fun training is extremely important. Also, having your dog trust you is very important to teamwork, so train with the respect of the dog in mind.

I look forward to further adventures with my smooth girl, and hope that we have inspired a few of you to grab a tennis ball and a tug toy and have some fun with your Salukis!

