

Is It Real Or Is It Video?

Today, many aspects of working with animals have been simplified and made more accessible thanks to the widespread use of video. Good quality videos can help you train a puppy, explore a new canine sport, and evaluate the top dogs in the breed. According to research by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass at Stamford, it is widely believed that our brains make no distinction between watching and listening to an expert in person or on a video.

Dog owners use videos for everything from basic training to training for specific sports like agility, obedience, and Frisbee competition and training specific ways like Clicker Training. You can use videos like Michael Kemp's How to Groom An Airedale to learn how to strip and trim a show dog or Joanne Helm's video How to Groom Your Pet Airedale to learn how to clip and trim a pet Airedale. You can use video to learn how to do the Tellington T-Touch to relax and calm your dog, to learn how to communicate with your dog, and to learn the calming signals that dogs naturally use among themselves. There are tapes demonstrating breed standards, like the AKC tape on the Airedale or the breed club tapes for the Borzoi, the German Shepherd, and the Jack Russell Terrier. You can learn how to study and evaluate canine movement with tapes like Rachel Page Elliot's Dog Steps and Karen Armistad's, Key to Movement. The latter tape uses slow motion and on-screen arrows to train your eye to see good and bad movement no matter how thick the coat on a dog. And Pat Hastings, Puppy Puzzle, demonstrates how to evaluate the structural soundness of a puppy at eight weeks of age. If you want to show your dog, you can use tapes like Michael Kemp's, Show Handling I and II, to learn basic and intermediate handling techniques.

Why is video so popular? It is immediate; it is real; and it is there. Ninety-four percent of American homes have VCRs, and video lets people see and learn in a way that is close to experiencing the real thing. We have all experienced the fact that it does not take a conscious effort on our part to believe and react to what we see in a video. We know it is not a real dinosaur thundering toward us on the screen, but our hearts still race.

Can you really learn from video? Psychologists say that 85 percent of what we learn comes through our eyes. In a study in 1988, University of Nebraska researchers found there was no difference in the test scores of students taught via video or in regular classes with instructors. According to Andy Konchan, executive director of e-commerce at UBS Warburg, the most powerful retention of information occurs when you can see, hear and interact. He has found that video communication—because it uses all three of those senses—increases the quality and amount of information retained.

Video is a boon for the person looking for information: it gives them access to experts without the need to travel or pay high fees for training classes. And since each lesson is repeatable, many people feel they get more out of the expert than they could in a one-time seminar, especially since television-quality video and sound ensure that the information is transmitted accurately and uniformly to everyone.

Video learning works best when the viewer can immediately apply what they have learned. Someone watching a clicker training tape at home can immediately try out what they have learned on their own dogs. Likewise, someone studying canine movement in either the Key to Movement tape or in the Montgomery tapes can also test what they have learned watching their own dogs move.

ATCA member and owner-handler April Stevens gets the Montgomery tapes every year. She says it is neat to go back and see how today's winning dogs looked as puppies in the puppy sweeps and in turn to see their get in more recent puppy sweeps. She also says that she gets ideas for solving handling problems from tapes: For example, she was having problems with Carlos, who won an award of merit with her handling him at this year's Montgomery, using his ears consistently in the ring. She watched old Montgomery Best of Breed tapes and saw handlers baiting the dogs down. She studied how they did that and started practicing their techniques with Carlos. It worked. As April said, "If you are going to compete as an owner-handler, you have to put in the time and study everything you can to learn how to be a winning competitor." In addition, April says, "It is invaluable to get someone to tape you handling your dog so you can learn from your own performance and improve your techniques each time you go into the ring."

Horse breeders have used video extensively for selling, buying and evaluating horses. With video, a prospective buyer can see horses at work and see their conformation and movement in action. Videos enable them to spot good and bad conformation, show how faults affect different types of horses and help people learn which faults they can live with and which they must avoid. ATCA member Al Capone breeds Airedales; she also breeds Standard Bred horses. Most pacers and trotters are sold in their yearling year at auctions like the ones in Harrisburg PA and in Lexington KY. Since you cannot harness a yearling to determine how it moves and how it is built, breeders rely on videos of the yearlings running in the field. Buyers and breeders can watch how they are moving and see if they throw their back or front feet. Al says that if you are trying to sell a yearling at one of these big sales without a video, buyers will not notice your horse.

In addition, video is ideal to capture the atmosphere of an event and to provides a permanent record of events like the ATCA specialty at Montgomery. The ATCA has been having the Montgomery show taped since 1993. Not only do these tapes record the top dogs in the nation each year, they also enable people to go back and study the grandparents of the dogs they have today, and in the future, people will be able to see for themselves the great dogs of these years.

One of the best things about video is that viewers control when and where they view them and they control the pace: they can move through them at a comfortable speed, they can skip what they are not interested in, rewind and review what they want to study in more detail, and view them at convenient times in their schedules. Lynn McCain (Tolyn Airedales) says that she watches the Montgomery tapes every year because she cannot travel all over the country looking at dogs." She finds the tapes a great way to pre-screen potential stud dogs. She also tapes her own dogs so that she can examine their movement and their grooming. "With video," she says, "I can slow down the speed to study my dogs

in slow motion and see how they are really moving. I can also see where I need to take off hair or add hair to get the best possible look for the show ring.”

As April says, “If you are going to compete as an owner-handler, you have to put in the time and study everything you can to learn how to be a winning competitor.