

Newfs in Action

With their natural water ability, Newfoundlands enjoy making a splash – and one group is raising money for charity while training life-saving rescues



‘Noble, majestic and powerful’ is how the Kennel Club describes the Newfoundland. It goes on: ‘Large draught and water dog, with natural life-saving instinct. Exceptionally gentle, docile nature. His versatility has served man well. In more recent times, jumping out to rescue swimmers in distress.’

The group Newfs in Action trains and demonstrates the breed’s water-rescue skills with Newfoundlands

retrieving and rescuing victims who have fallen into rivers, ponds and lakes. On this occasion, the group was showing their abilities at Gatton Park Country Show near Reigate in Surrey.

FISHERMEN’S FRIEND

“Newfoundlands were originally from Newfoundland, Canada,” explained organiser Cheryl Payne. “They were specifically bred to be a working dog. They have great power. They went out on the fishing boats and

it was considered extremely unlucky to fish without a Newfoundland on board. I’m told that, even today, fishermen have something that resembles a Newfoundland dog on them, be that an ornament or a pendant, for example.”

The dogs are perfectly adapted to water work, with their oily, waterproof coat and webbed feet.

Cheryl adds, “Having webbed feet enables them to do a ‘breast stroke’ instead of a doggie paddle. They can



propel with all four limbs rather than just the front two. Their paws help them make a strong 'catch' through the water and it's propelling them 'over' the water rather than dragging through it. And they have a double coat that stops the water penetrating the skin, which is why they can go on for so long and not get cold."

BORN TO SWIM

Newfs on Action began in 2010 when, according to Cheryl, a group of Newfoundland owners got together to work their dogs in the way that they were originally bred to work.

"But we also wanted to combine that with raising funds for charities," said Cheryl. "And then, as we evolved, we knew that we wanted to promote water safety.

"With the chairman, Philip Payne, being a former president of the Kent branch of the Royal Lifesaving Society (RLSS), and former firefighter, it was fitting that the club should work to promote the water safety messages of the RLSS, and in partnership with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. We wanted to make sure we promoted the society to save lives and also raise funds for the RLSS and other charities. On top of all the hard work, the dogs have an awful lot of fun."

Sara Davies has travelled all the way from Carmarthen with her dog Kubeba, to be at the Gatton Park display, a round trip of almost 500 miles.

"He's going in three times this afternoon as part of the display," says Sara. "He's my third Newfoundland. I've always liked them as a breed. I find them very laidback, yet very hard working. They tend to be good with children, good with people, yet they've got this hard-working capability as well."

This afternoon, Kubeba eagerly does a 'Don't drink and drown' rescue demonstration to an enthusiastic and excited crowd.

Sue Scott is here with two dogs, Marilyn and Matilda. Sue is the secretary of the club and one of the founder members.

"Marilyn will be seven in September. She's a very easy dog to train. She'll do everything in the water. She'll take the boat and she'll



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The dogs demonstrate around a dozen activities – from towing seven people on a long line, through to rescuing an unconscious person

tow an unconscious person laying in the water.”

Sue Whittaker joined Newfs in Action over 12 years ago. "I'm one of the older members," she says and adds, "I found that the more I worked my Newfoundland, the better behaved she was. I love doing the swimming, which comes so naturally to them. It's easy to train them once you master the basics."

SHAKE IT OFF

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Some of the dogs are reluctant to come out of the water after their displays. A crowd has gathered around the dogs' fenced-off launch and landing area. The first thing the dogs do when they came ashore is to vigorously shake the excess water out of their coats, in turn, drenching everyone in the vicinity,

eliciting shrieks and screams of delight from the younger children who have manoeuvred themselves to the front of the crowd. The adults are less impressed, especially those with cameras and mobile phones!

The displays are a great success. The dogs behave faultlessly and draw enthusiastic applause from the gathered crowd throughout each display.

But if you're tempted to go out and get a Newfoundland dog of your own, beware and do some serious research. These are big dogs and have big needs. The members of Newfs in Action are specialists who have years of experience in owning such large dogs.

Perhaps the last word should go to 10-year-old Gary Thompson from Reigate. He simply describes the whole demonstration and dogs as, "Awesome!" 🐾

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