Reviewers' Corner
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as quickly as you can get to the bookstore!

Linda Lawn is the owner and Director of Training of Happy Tails Pet and Obedience Training in Louisville, KY, where she conducts more than 30 pet training classes as well as private instruction each week, reaching over 1200 pet families every year. Linda contributes articles regularly to the local publication, Feeders Readers, and to the Pet Lover's Guide in the Courier Journal.

The Language of Dogs - Understanding Canine Body Language and Other Communication Signals, Sarah Kalnajs (Blue Dog Training & Behavior LLC, 2006, 2 hours 13 minutes, 2-disc set, $55.00)

Reviewer: Valerie Pollard
Content: 🐾🐾🐾🐾
Production: 🐾🐾🐾🐾
Audience: Anyone interested in dogs, either professionally or as a hobbyist; all new trainers and as a tool for clients to further understanding of their dog's behavior.

Sarah Kalnajs, CPDT, CDBC, has extensive experience in the study of behavior. She has worked in Hawaii with marine mammals, studied with Dr. Roger Abrantes in Denmark, is a member of the advisory board and faculty of Cynology College, runs her own training business (Blue Dog Training & Behavior) as well as being actively involved in many other aspects of training and rescue. The Language of Dogs is a 2-DVD set which is attractively packaged with an eye-catching photograph close-up of a dog's face on the front, and clear text on the back, including a photo of Sarah and one of her dogs. A new introduction and ending have been added to the original seminar footage as well as chapter headings and text of audience questions. These additions give extra dimension to the presentation so that the viewer gets a sense of continuity and completeness.

The DVDs, as mentioned above, are based on a seminar in which Sarah is discussing video examples of canine body language continued on page 38

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taken from her temperament tests of shelter dogs. Sarah uses a thorough and careful set of exercises in her testing, as well as a partnership between a primary and secondary handler while evaluating a dog. Sarah emphasizes the importance of taking what you see in its context and to look at each dog as an individual. She also cautions viewers not to focus too much on any one signal, as often many signals may be given at once, giving out layers of information.

The attention to detail in this presentation can only be called amazing. There are clear, vivid examples of the most subtle body language—such as soft eyes versus hard eyes; quick “freezes” (when a dog tenses in discomfort which may be a precursor to a bite)—as well as examples of overt aggression, including the lunge of an English Bulldog in an attempt to reach Sarah’s throat—shown again in slow-motion so you can observe the seconds just before the dog makes his decision to lunge. There are well-done examples of distance-decreasing signals (play-bows, soft relaxed body postures) as well as distance-increasing signals (flagging tails, various signs of stress). One of Sarah’s most brilliant ideas is her definition of what she calls a “Tap Out” (based on the term used in Ultimate Fighting, wherein a fighter can end the fight by tapping his hand on the floor as a signal that he is surrendering the fight; a way of escape). Sarah explains and gives visual examples of many dogs slowly lowering themselves to the ground, usually head first and rather stiffly and then offering their belly, but not, as Sarah is careful to point out, because they want you to pet them, but rather because they are stressed and want to surrender completely so that you will "leave them alone."

There are heartwarming moments, such as video of Max the Labrador, who is so deathly afraid of men, his improvement after Sarah takes him in with...
her own “pack” of Shelties and American Eskimos and then in his new home a year later. There are also frighteningly cold moments, such as Meathead, the seven-month old Rottweiler pup who displays violent aggression as a resource guarder (quick warning and then fast bite, shake and tear of the Assess-a-Hand®) and then focuses his attention not on the Assess-a-Hand®, but up onto the face of the person holding it, demonstrating how and why you would label such a dog as a Level 10.

Sarah herself is extremely personable, entertaining and clear in her thoughts, and professional in her terminology.

There is really so much more on these DVD’s that is important in the world of canine body language, from the submissive grin to sweaty paws to the windmilling tail—I recommend this set highly.

Valerie Pollard has been training dogs professionally since 1979, and has always been interested in understanding the psychology and behavior of dogs. She specializes in working with owners on behavioral concerns, particularly aggression and anxiety issues. Valerie is a charter member of the APDT, a clinical member of the IADBC, and is endorsed by NADOI. She competes with her own dog in the sport of Schutzhund. Valerie lives in Southern CA with her family, including kids, horses, and dogs.