

Leo U Working Dog Interview

1. What are your Leo's names (past and present, registered names and call names), age and sex?

Forevergreens Woodstock aka Abe, 5 years old, male

Legacy's Basilius Hayden aka Basil, 2 years 10 months, male

2. How long have you had Leos? What originally drew you to the Leonberger breed?

Abe is our first Leonberger, in fact he is our first purebred dog. Abe has created a whole list of "firsts" in our lives. But in fact the true reason for our interest in Leonbergers was a fuzzy 4 month old puppy named Ozzie. Ozzie was a rescue puppy. When we took him to puppy class the trainer said, "It looks like you have a Leonberger there!" This was the first time we had ever heard the word LEONBERGER. We did some research, saw the article in Dog World, went to some shows in the state of Washington and we were hooked. Their beauty, size, gentle nature and the way their humans loved them, just invited us in, head over heels. In honor of Ozzie's passing (we think he could have been a Leo mix, but was more Chow- like than Leos are) we adopted Abe from Sarah at Forevergreens.

3. For you, what is the most appealing characteristic of the breed?

I love the versatility of the breed and I am thrilled that the LCA is committed to celebrating their versatility by offering three levels of versatility titles, plus a Hall of Fame. If properly socialized and trained, your Leonberger can accompany you on any outing!

4. How did you first get involved in dog sports?

I am lucky enough to have access to private trainers, a local kennel club, and a local dog training club, and have befriended like minded Leonberger people and Greater Swiss Mountain Dog people from our region. Steve took puppy kindergarten and beginning obedience classes at Pet Smart to socialize Abe as a puppy, and begin his obedience training. We also took "real life" classes from a private trainer. These were group classes held in public places to expose him to all sorts of sights, sounds, elevators, traffic, people, etc. This lead to Steve and Abe being tested as a therapy dog team. At one year of age he got his CGC and they became a registered therapy dog team. But I also wanted to try a dog sport with him, so I began attending drop in style obedience classes offered by our local kennel club. These classes segued into the formal rally and obedience classes that both Abe and Basil and I continue to participate in at our local dog

training club. Some of these people had never experienced a phenomenon commonly known as the Leonberger lag, with most members owning and training Australian Shepherds!

But the most enjoyable and rewarding dog sports we have learned from our working dog friends. We attended a large regional Leonberger social event in 2014 and witnessed our dear friend and her carting Leonberger give a demonstration on drafting and knew we could do this! You might need to do some traveling to find others who enjoy carting. It is a small but growing community. Through this working dog friendship with both Leonberger friends and Greater Swiss Mountain Dog friends, I have now begun training Basil in draft work and in Pack hiking.

5. What are your dogs' biggest accomplishments in the sport thus far?

Abe and Steve are a draft team. They just earned the title of Open Draft Dog. They work so well together and make it look easy. It is not easy! There are so many aspects of a draft test, and it is all or none-Pass or Fail-everything has to be done correctly with no margin for errors. Abe and I are working on the Rally Excellent title. Not only do we take rally classes, but I teach a Novice/Advanced level class with three other ladies from our training club, and Abe helps as a demo dog! Traditional obedience has been difficult for us and even though we have a Beginner Novice title, it wasn't fun. There are changes pending in the way the AKC conducts the long sit stays and down stays in the Novice test, and I am pretty confident these changes will help Abe earn his CD. But his biggest and most loved accomplishment is the children's reading program that he and Steve started at our local library over three years ago!

Basil's greatest accomplishments are yet to come. He and I will be taking the Novice Draft test for the first time this fall. I learned the hard way not to rush your dog into anything he was not ready for. Never assume that just because your first dog was a natural at something, that your subsequent dogs will follow suit. They are individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses. At one time Basil was fearful of the cart, but we have slowly worked together on this. For months our dining room furnishings included a handsome Wilcek cart! Dinner was served in it-his, that is! He is no longer fearful and he is showing himself to be a good worker.

Basil also has his Novice Rally, Novice Trick Dog and Beginner Novice Obedience titles and we are conditioning ourselves for the cooler weather pack hikes. This fall we will also try Nose Work!

6. Are there certain characteristics that make your Leos well suited to the sport? Did you choose him/her as a puppy with these characteristics in mind?

I think the Leonberger's versatility makes them well suited to almost any dog sport. Find one or several that you think you might be interested in and get out there and try It! If you are fortunate

enough to have a dog that will look you in the eyes and wait for your instructions feel blessed and lucky and go far with him or her.

We are new to Leonbergers, so no, we did not choose our puppies with performance titles in mind. In the future, it is my hope that there will be more and more Leonbergers who not only adhere to breed standard, and pass all of their health tests, but proudly display their suffix titles!

7. Do you find that training a Leo is different than training other breeds? If so, how have you changed your criteria and techniques to meet the needs of your Leo partner?

We have never trained our dogs beyond basic obedience. These dogs have changed our lives! What I have learned is to be consistent, give clear signals and commands and teach the basics early. Make training enjoyable and do it often. Do a little bit everyday. Fade the treats once they understand what you are teaching. Don't forget that the AKC isn't the only performance venue available. There is UKC and C-wags and the Companion Dog Sports program (CDSP). Find something you both enjoy and get out there. Also consider seeking out other working breed's regional clubs to find even more opportunities to work with your dog.

8. What are your Top 3 Tips for training a Leonberger?

Smile at your dog

Give clear commands

Reward good behavior

9. Do your Leos have guilty/naughty pleasures? (Or maybe they are perfect, but most Leos seem to have that one thing that they can't/won't grow out of that becomes somehow endearing over the years 😊.)

Basil is a toy hog. It doesn't matter that he may have one already, he inevitably wants the one that someone else is playing with! And Abe has us trained to sit on the floor and hand feed him.

Crazy. ❤️