



Rutland Dog Training

www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

Barking & Lunging by Adam Beral

We are a retired couple who have an adorable four year-old Border Terrier. She is the best house dog ever - never barks at doorbells, strangers, postmen etc, in fact, does not bark in the house or the garden at all. When we take her out she is like an animal possessed. She barks ferociously at dogs, cars, vans, bikes even motorised wheel chairs. We have tried distracting her in all sorts of ways - looking for something in the hedge, treats, air spray, whistle, angry voice, coaxing voice but she is totally in another zone. She practically takes your arm off pulling on the lead. We are now getting to the stage where it is so upsetting we do not want to walk her at all. We do not want to try an electronic collar as they look as though they could be quite painful. Is our only alternative to muzzle her when we are out? Incidentally, up until a few months ago, she would bark at other dogs but we could distract her fairly easily. This problem has got worse.

Thank you for taking the time to write in. As you may have noticed if you read my column regularly, this is not an unusual problem and it is often terrier breeds that are most at risk of developing these sorts of behaviours. The problem is definitely one that can be solved, but it may take time and it certainly won't be easy.

If I can first pick up on a couple of points in your letter. You mention that you are wary about using an electric collar as they look as though they could be quite painful. You are quite right to think that and regardless of the welfare implications I do not think it would be a useful tool in solving your particular problem. Further, you mention using a muzzle. Although this would certainly limit some of her outward signs such as barking, it would not make her much more manageable as she would still be pulling on the lead. Moreover, it would not improve her emotional frame of mind at all.

What is going to be necessary in the early stages is to remove her from the situation and take her mind off whatever has caught her attention. You ideally need to remove her before she has flared up into her full-blown barking, lunging behaviour. If you are walking through the park and spot a dog heading towards you, the second her ears prick up you need to work very hard to divert her attention. I normally jog round in circles, stepping in front of the dog as I do. Because you are moving fast and are in their space, they have no alternative but to pay attention to you instead of whatever else is around. Continue doing this until the threat has gone and then praise her.



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Hand in hand with this goes a gradual programme of getting her used to some of these things. Perhaps enlist a friend with a bike or a wheelchair and first get your dog used to the item when it is stationary before gradually moving it, giving her treats as long as she remains calm. She may also benefit from wearing a DAP collar to keep her calmer, however I would suggest seeing a professional behaviourist for some more detailed advice.

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