**Building a Bond with** **Your K9 Partner**

The day a K9 officer meets his or her partner is a day a lifelong bond is formed. It isn’t hard to under­stand why—though they’ve got a badge and a set of crucial skills, at the end of the day, K9 officers are waggly-tailed, lovable companions that just so happen to be pretty big badasses, too. It’s for all of these reasons that K9s are growing in demand in police departments in the United States and throughout the world.

Police dogs have a long history in law en­forcement, used since the Middle Ages. To­day, these brave officers are trained in vari­ous high-stakes police jobs, from protecting their handlers to sniffing out drugs, to identi­fying explosives. Of course, these dogs are also vital in searching for missing people, with German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois are among the most common breeds employed for human search applications.

One of the things that makes K9 po­lice work possible is the dedication and patience of the dog’s human handler. It’s extremely important that a deep bond is forged because, as all officers know, teamwork can prevent life-and-death situations. Forging a bond between an­imal and officer is absolutely vital. With­out trust, mutual respect, loyalty, and understanding, the important jobs listed above would not be possible.

**What It’s Like to Have a K9 Partner?**

There’s a Lot of Training: One of the things many people don’t realize is that,

though some breeds are more natural­ly suited to police work than others, there’s a ton of training that goes into the job. Each and every police dog and handler requires hundreds of hours of training to get things right, and dogs must be recertified every year. Among handlers, this is generally an around- the-clock job, as police dogs live with their partners at home—and most wouldn’t have it any other way.

There are a Lot of Long Nights: An­other thing many people don’t realize about K9 work is that it requires a lot of middle-of-the-night missions. Dogs who are trained to track work much better at night than people, which means that trainers must be willing to not only work through the night when training but also respond to calls at all hours once the K9 has been officially sworn into the department.

Lots of Care Required: Police dogs are natural athletes, so handlers must ensure that they get enough exercise and stay fit enough that they can conquer big missions. On top of that, working pups expend a lot of energy, and their jobs de­pend on it, so they will usually need a specially formulated diet.

Lots of Love: One of the things that K9 handlers love the most about the job is that they get to work with their dog every day. If you’re a dog-lover, you know how amaz­ing that sounds! Indeed, these ani­mals may be serious when they’ve clocked in, but, like you, they need affection, love, and handler-dog playtime when they’re off-duty.

**Building the Unbreakable Bond**

If you’re considering entering into the K9 unit or working with these brilliant animals in one capacity or another, you orobably won’t need to work too hard to build a bond. The fact is, handlers •mow their dogs have serious jobs, out, at the end of the day, they’re sim- oly (sometimes spoiled) family pets.

As you can see from the infor­mation above, handlers and K9s spend a lot of time together and often come away from their training experience with a natural bond, a "sally good thing when it comes to law enforcement, where closeness and mutual respect mean more success overall.

Here are some ways handlers fork to strengthen the crucial bond with their furry, badged buddies:

Off-Duty Playtime: Dog handlers know that, in order to earn the ad­oration and loyalty of their partners, they must make time for playtime. Something as simple as tossing a ball to your K9 dog can help lay the foundation for a long, fruitful work­ing relationship and friendship. It’s important to teach working dogs that they can relax and play at home but that there are certain scenarios where they must be pro­fessional.

Off-Duty Outings: Taking your dog with you on special off-duty mis­sions is a great way to build your mutual love and to introduce him to exciting, new scenarios. Many handlers take their dogs to pub­lic places—stores, parks, com­munity fairs, etc.—to train them around people and strangers and to strengthen that bond. Most po­lice departments allow handlers to take their dogs with them on vaca­tion as well.

Integrating at Work and Home: Most people know not to pet working dogs when they spot them out in the wild while on duty, but dogs were bred for affection and should get plenty of petting

and playtime at home. Be sure to give “off-duty” time at the de­partment as well so that your fel­low officers can get to know your pup, too.

Get Lots of Exercise: As previous­ly mentioned, most police dogs are natural athletes and will need to release their energy periodical­ly. Integrating your K9 into your exercise routine, whether that is a long hike or a jog at the park, will help make your bond even more unbreakable and make your pet love you even more if that’s even possible.

**It Takes Time and Energy**

Though working with a K9 partner is one of the most rewarding paths in law enforcement, it doesn’t come without sacrifice and hard work. Not all officers are cut out to be han­dlers, and not all pups are cut out to be K9 workers. Generally speak­ing, officers who are already “dog people” and who are willing to put in the time, love, and energy for their partner will be the most successful in this field. The reward co

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