

A Rottweiler's Defense

Choosing "The Road of Love"

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In writing for this magazine, I do not feel alone with my conviction that the Rottweiler, in many senses, is a remarkable breed. On the other hand, it is not only positive with the overwhelming Rottweiler fever that is a rising trend today.

Mrs. Gerd Hydén, a Swedish breeder in the 1950's (kennel Saltsjöborg) declared "the worst thing that could happen to a breed is that it gains too much popularity".

We all can see the point in this. What happened to the competent sport and military dog Collie after the "Lassie-fever"? And, honestly, who is convinced that the movies with "Rin-Tin-Tin" only lead to a positive development for the German shepherd? Not to mention Pongo and the 101 spots on correct places - but how many living Dalmatians are equipped with the brilliant intelligence of the principal part of a cartoon?

And now, the star of the Rottweiler is rising. Many people fall in love with these impressive and beautiful dogs mainly because of their looks, and sometimes, at worst, because of their power and strength. A marvelous work of art and a power to count on in almost any field.

But what if the owner does not care to work with a dog such as this? Or chooses only to reinforce negative behaviour? As we all know, the Rottweiler is a powerful friend and a highly competent guard dog. We can develop an angel - or a monster. Trainer's choice...

I am not saying that our dogs are more dangerous than other breeds. My experience is quite the contrary. A healthy and balanced Rottweiler has a strong barrier against biting which prevents the dog from causing any damage. But, with "breeding" merely planned out of sheer greed, using God knows what kind of dogs, several problems appear.

Who wants to buy these puppies? I do not. I hope this goes for all readers of TTRM. But, they exist and they are sold - often to people with little or no previous experience with Rottweilers. Some of these "new" Rottweiler owners are given advice from the breeder to "remember Rottweilers are rock hard. You have to show him from the first day that you are the boss!".

The way I see it, there is absolutely no need to choose "the trail of conflicts" if you want to teach your Rottweiler cooperation and nice manners. Walking together along "the road of love" makes everything so much easier and you never endanger your relation in a fight that you are not physically capable of winning.

Sometimes I am asked how on earth I can live together with these "big" dogs? I am handicapped and am in a wheelchair.



Photographer: Goran Erkson

What, for instance, if my Rottweiler decides to run away from me? It makes me laugh and I wish good luck to anyone believing that they could run faster than a dog! Nice try... So what do I do in a situation like that? Easy, I just turn around and drive my wheelchair away as fast as possible from my dog. My dogs seem to like me. Otherwise, I do not think they would be so keen to run after me.

I shake my head to the stupidity of comments some breeders hand out.

I pass through larger cities and meet dogs who are working with an impressive efficiency in a completely mad direction. I keep shaking my head, reading about the most unbelievable mixes between breeds, where the temperaments cannot possibly cause anything but a disaster, colliding in the head of a poor dog with a "master" who is more or less flying at the other end of the leash. No knowledge on how to read the dog's signals or working to foresee situations.

I keep shaking my head. Sometimes, I fear that my neck is going to break.

Lost in a feeling of "this is unbelievable, why do not people understand better?" I started writing letters to the editors for Swedish papers. Being a professional writer, I am quite spoiled with the fact that if I write an article, it most likely will be published.

But, when it came to speaking out some kind of "advocation" for this misunderstood breed, I found an immense wall of resistance in front of myself. Obviously, it is more selling to keep topping the headlines with an almost perverted interest in blowing up big news out of accidents and disaster caused by Rottweilers.

No matter if it is a mixed breed with just an ounce of Rottweiler, or if the "accident" so highly enlarged when it comes to terms



Photographer: Maria Bostrom

was almost nothing. Anything for money - and tickling peoples fear always seems to be a rewarding act.

I have discussed it with journalists and got the reply "Well, maybe it was not a Rottweiler in this particular case...but that is a word people recognize and know the meaning of... It's just an example of frightening dog - why do you take it so seriously?"

Yes, why?

Maybe, because I have felt connected with the breed ever since the first Rottweiler entered my life when I was 16. A few months after leaving home, I began suffering from a certain abstinence for a dog by my side. Being used to a whole bunch of furry friends since early childhood, the lack was quite obvious. Thanks to friends of our family, I could get a "second hand dog" of a breed I never had given a thought before; a Rottweiler.

This "lady", Bergsgårdens Happy, taught me something new, namely what it can be living with "the perfect companion". We spent some years together, living in the centre of Uppsala, a university town with about 160,000 citizens. The breed was not too big in Sweden then. I was often asked "if my Dobermann should not be put on a diet?" She was a Champion and looked just like a Rottweiler should. She did not have a tail but that was not her fault! My Rottweiler friend had motivation, stability and was a brilliant example of what a real good Rottweiler can be like. My heart was lost to the breed...

Life brings many changes, some of them you cannot control but you almost always have a choice on how to behave in a situation. One of my biggest trials (so far) was when, at the age of 28, without any previous warning, I became paralyzed due to an aneurysm in my neck. Saying that it was a rather tough period is not exactly overdoing it. My son was 15 months old, my dog (a Labrador Retriever named "Chuck") was 5 years old and I was desperately needed at home. Instead, I had to spend six months in the hospital, struggling with rehabilitation to be able to manage my own wheelchair and take care of myself. Today, my right side works normally, other than I am not too strong on it.

Nova came in to my life. After some "dogless" years, I felt that it was time for a puppy. I had thousands of arguments for and against different breeds...and every time I ended up with The Breed.

After months of research, I found a small kennel and a breeder, with whom I shared most of the basic ideas about the noble Rottweiler. She had a litter. When I met the mother, I felt something of Happy's friendly coolness. A

month later, Nova (Grozzos Hertan) moved in to this family - and from the first day she has been my dog. Strangely enough, many people still believe that it is my son or my partner who walk and train her. The truth is, that she stays in bed as long as I am sleeping because she knows that nothing is happening without me. And, talking about running after your dog - who can "walk" it at the speed of 15 km./h for one hour or more if required? I can.

It was most natural to teach her "practical things", such as retrieving everything I dropped that I asked for her to pick up, no matter what it is - ie a log, a stamp, a tin can or a coin. We kept training "typical assistance dog tasks", mostly for fun, and she soon had learned how to pull off my shoes, socks and sweater - closing drawers and doors - pushing buttons etc.

When she was 2½, we passed an examination for Marie Fogelqvist, one of the most experienced persons in this field, and Nova gained the title "Certified Assistance Dog" as the first Rottweiler in Sweden. In the next issue of TTRM, I will write an article describing this part of our life.

When I came out into society with Nova, I found that many things had changed since I was walking with Happy by my side. People seldom ask what breed Nova is. They are fully convinced that they know everything about these dogs. And, oh yes, mostly their education is of a marvelous and highly academical art = all facts come directly from the headlines of evening papers. After being told uncountable times that "this is a murder dog, bred to fight - and yes, that's the truth!" I taught Nova to shake her head at the question "Are you a fighting dog?"

And, since my efforts to write letters to the editors never seemed to work out my way, I finally decided to write a book in which I gave the nice (and typical!) Rottweiler a voice, as a strong reply to all the inaccurate lies that seemed to gain most publicity.

The title of my first book was self-evident, "A Rottweiler's Defense". The Swedish novelist, August Strindberg, published "A Madman's Defense" in 1887. It is a novel in which the writer tries to penetrate and understand his stormy marriage and complicated relation to the opposite sex.

My relation to the Rottweiler is crystal clear; I love this breed from the bottom of my heart! And, therefore, I wanted to show all sides of it. Altogether, the book consists of 30 chapters where mentality, health and capability to work are emphasized as highly important. Interviewing active Rottweiler owners has been a nice task and in the book I am very proud to introduce Rottweilers working with obedience, agility, IPO, guarding - or as police dogs, rescue dogs, service dogs and performing other kinds of "social heroic deeds".

The book was released in 2006 and is the most extensive work in Swedish on the Rottweiler. My aim has been to show all sides of this precious dogs - and to point out that the rottie's not just a nice pillow to decorate you sofa - they need an engaged and competent owner who cares to provide them with interesting challenges and a natural place in the family.

One of my worse nightmares is that the readers will come to the conclusion that "The Rottweiler must be an extremely easily trained dog if a handicapped person could teach it that much!" I dare say no. Especially not if the owner chooses "the trail of conflicts" instead of "the road of love". The Rottweiler is a marvelous friend and we could easily deserve its heart if we just care to be honest, straight and respectful. "What comes around goes around" is a saying that's highly relevant also in this case...!

Asa Tova Bergh