

KAISER, MEET FLUFFY *Dogs and cats living together!*

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Eternal enemies? Or kissing cousins? Dogs and cats have shared in the companionship of human beings since ancient times and continue to hold the two top spots in current pet popularity polls. Whether around a prehistoric campfire or in front of a wide-screen TV, these two distinct species have had to coexist in order to benefit from their human guardians. Today, when an animal lover wants to enjoy the companionship of both a dog and a cat, he may be surprised at how well the two can get along. Likewise, he might be mortified when he witnesses a mini-Wild Kingdom episode every time both animals are in the same room. The dog and cat relationship is always subjective, but the bottom line is this: **most dogs will chase most cats.**

One of the behavioral traits shared by both dogs and cats is something called **prey drive**. This is the instinct that drives a cat to ferociously chase a bug, a piece of string, or any other small, erratically moving object. In dogs, the degree of prey drive varies from breed to breed and then again from dog to dog within those breeds. Many terriers have an over-the-top prey drive, developed from centuries of rodent hunting. The prey drive of many of the sporting dogs is shaped and conditioned into retrieving behavior: the human actually kills the prey and the canine simply fetches it without eating it. Prey drive is not always a problem in the more versatile working and herding breeds, who tend to be higher in **defense** (guarding behavior) and may have been developed to protect other species of animals that would look like dinner to a more primitive canid like a wolf or a coyote. However, there are members of the Doberman family who exhibit intense prey drive and who should never be placed in a home where there are cats, ferrets, rabbits or other small animals. These are dogs who see every other species of animal as a potential meal. They also are the ones who tend to vigorously chase cars, bicycles and joggers. This doesn't make them bad dogs; most of the high prey dogs I've worked with have sunny temperaments and do just fine with obedience commands. They just need to be more carefully placed than their less ambitious cousins.

A frequent complaint from my students is that their Doberman adores or at least ignores the resident cat in their home, but turns into The Great Hunter when the neighbors' kitty dares to show its face. Most dogs learn to accept and tolerate a cat which is a constant presence in their home; an animal which is often asleep or sitting quietly on a windowsill and which knows how to avoid trouble by staying out of sight if things get too exciting. The resident cat's scent is already permeating the house and is a major part of the "scent map" which a dog uses to identify his surroundings. However, a strange cat becomes a prey object for most dogs: it smells different, it looks different, and probably behaves differently in response to the dog it doesn't know. The sight of a terrified kitty tearing full speed across the lawn can bring out a dog's inner wolf in a heartbeat.

Knowing that many of our potential adopters wish to own both a Dobe and a cat makes "cat testing" a mandatory part of the evaluation process. Understanding each dog's prey drive allows us to assess the potential for future problems, and gives the adoptive owners a heads-up. However, no matter how thorough we are, we cannot guarantee that a particular dog and cat will ignore each other in the new home. And most importantly, the new owners must understand a basic tenet of good training: **you can't train a dog to not**

have prey drive. Ever. You can only use obedience training as a way of maintaining control when the prey drive starts to kick in.

CAT TESTING 101

So what is a "cat test", exactly? In simple terms, it is the evaluation of a given dog's natural, unimpeded reaction to a given cat. Walking a dog on a tight lead up to a cat doesn't suffice. First of all, a dog which is being restrained will "load" ; ie, get over excited by the presence of any distraction, feline, canine or human. Picture an old-time movie in which there is a fight scene: the more the two antagonists' buddies try to hold them back, the more the antagonists scramble to get at each other. A tightened lead gives the dog a physical cue that his handler is worried, and makes him more eager to act upon his concerns. Therefore, when introducing one of the Dobermans to a living distraction of any species, we attempt to have as slack a lead as possible so as not to influence the dog's natural reactions.

When presented with a sedentary kitty that sits nonchalantly at his approach, a Dobe might investigate with the infamous "Dobe probe", that ever-present cold poke of his nose. If no reaction takes place, he might decide to ignore the cat or he might up the ante by switching into **play drive**; bowing and barking in order to engage the cat in a game. This is when the true test takes place. Most self-respecting cats will either swat at the dog's nose or will swiftly move away, and this is the trigger for prey drive in an average dog. The quick movement of the cat's defense or escape usually elicits an excited response from the dog. Unfortunately, this is where the test usually stops for many people: if the dog shows anything more than a passing interest in the cat, then he's not considered cat safe. However, we try to dig a little deeper in the DRU cat tests. We're fortunate to have many patient and compassionate people among our prospective adopters; people who are willing to put in extra time and effort through obedience training in order to have a true partnership with their new dog. If they own a cat and fall in love with one of the typically playful young Dobes, we give them the information and skills they need in order to maintain interspecies peace in their household. Therefore, our cat tests continue onto a different level: the control factor.

While a dog is in the middle of cat-baiting, can he be corrected, called away and rewarded? We try to answer this question in all but the most violently prey-driven Dobes by giving a swift collar correction with the command "NO CATS"; followed by "(dog's name), COME!" and a food reward. If the correction itself "revs" the dog up, then his prospects for a cat-owning home are severely limited. Even without formal training, most of the dogs we see respond to their name and a bright, firm tone of voice. If this isn't enough to regain the dog's attention after a correction, he's off the list for cat owners.

Finally, if the prospect of a nice piece of frankfurt or cheese has no appeal to a dog who is normally a big chowhound, we know we're dealing with a super-strong prey drive and a dog who would definitely cause trouble for someone's kitty. The dogs which do respond to the command/correction/reward model in the context of cat testing are the ones we consider as possible candidates for cat owners to bring home. We always emphasize the subjectivity of the test and nag about the importance of continuing at least basic obedience in order to always have control. Dogs enrolled in the DRU U Training Program are worked in the presence of the cats during every session, but even with a formal education the plain truth is still the same: **most dogs will chase most cats**. Even though the Dobes that test out acceptably might not be interested in the resident shelter cats, the new owner's frisky

kitten might present more of a challenge. By giving the dogs and owners a common vocabulary through a few simple commands, we improve their chances at success.

YOUR DOBE AND YOUR CAT

If you adopt a Doberman who is considered to be relatively cat safe you'll still have some work ahead of you for the first few weeks. Even if your new guy is a big, gentle lug, try explaining that to Kitty. All she sees, hears and smells is a giant, threatening stranger. She might choose to hide out a lot during the first few days while the new boy settles in. As is true in most dog training issues, you shouldn't force anything at first. Let your new Dobe get accustomed to his new human family and his new home and let Kitty hide out and observe things if that's what she wants to do. Whenever you're not home, try to crate or confine your Dobe in a way that your cat won't go near him. This has less to do with your cat's safety (they're usually quite talented in escaping danger) and more to do with your dog's peace of mind. If Kitty keeps making an appearance when your dog is unable to approach her, his frustration level will build up and express itself in the very behavior we hope to avoid.

I generally recommend that your new Dobe spends the better part of his first weeks with you on lead in your home, in order to acclimate him to your daily routines and also to keep him readily at hand in order to praise, guide, or correct him as needed. If Kitty decides to make her appearance at one of these times, go ahead and let your dog investigate her. As always, try to keep the lead nice and slack. If your Dobe's behavior is fairly benevolent and curious, you can quietly praise him while reminding him "Be nice". If things look a little more confrontational, try the command/correction/reward sequence as shown to you by a DRU counselor or trainer. If your Dobe remembers learning this from his time at the shelter, it will help him to accept your own cat as readily as he accepted the shelter cats.

When your dog is off lead in your house, be prepared for him to take liberties. If his intentions have been proven as merely playful, you have less to worry about on the occasion that he does chase your cat. If you've been consistent with your obedience training all along, a firm "NO CATS" might help dial him back in. If not, go back to on-lead training in the house. Try to anticipate trouble. If you notice that your Dobe is "stalking" Kitty, interrupt him with "NO CATS" and the command sequence. Then distract him with a little playtime and praise. If the cat is in the middle of one of those strange tizzies that come upon members of the feline persuasion, be prepared to step in and control your dog. Even the most laid-back older Dobe can be persuaded to join in the fun when presented with a spinning, spazzing ball of fur.

To avoid serious trouble, don't expect your Dobe to blindly accept Kitty's presence on your lap, on the kitchen table, or near any of the dog's property (crate, food dish, toys). Dogs live in a physical world and equate proximity with possession; in other words, a cat on your lap is "staking you out" in the dog's mind. A cat near his crate or food is a threat to his possessions and territory. This doesn't mean that you don't allow your cat her usual freedom in your home; it just means that you have to police your Dobe a little more closely at first. After the first few weeks, you'll learn what provokes cat chasing in your new Dobe, and he'll learn what the limits are regarding it.

RULE NUMBER ONE: THERE ARE NO RULES

The most important thing to remember in the whole cat/dog relationship thing is that we as human beings cannot be privy to what sets a dog off against one cat while he tolerates cuddling from another. A DRU dog with a documented history as a cat killer used to totally ignore the shelter cats except to give them an affectionate nuzzle from time to time. Likewise, we've taken in dogs who grew up peacefully with several cats only to find that they become hard core predators when presented with our feline residents. If you adopt a Dobe that we've pegged as cat safe and have received proper handling instructions but you still have a problem, don't just assume that it will disappear. Call us and let us know what's going on so that we might be able to help you through the trouble.

Approached with consistency and common sense, the coexistence of Dobe and Kitty is attainable and enjoyable. And it makes for great photo ops, too!

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