

Japanese Spitz Obedience Training

By Charlotte Day

Training a dog is a rewarding experience that strengthens the bond between owner and pet, and for me, it has been a fulfilling journey with both my Japanese Spitz, Roxie, and Loki. From the very beginning, I was determined that my dogs would be well-trained, happy, and well-adjusted.

At 21, I brought home my first dog that was solely mine, rather than a family pet, an 8-week-old Japanese Spitz puppy I named Roxie. Small, fluffy, and incredibly cute, I was determined from the start that she wouldn't be a "handbag dog." I was committed to training her to the highest standard possible. Having done some research beforehand, I had already set our goal: to work through the four levels of the KC Good Citizen Dog Training Scheme—Puppy, Bronze, Silver, and Gold.

Once Roxie had received all her vaccinations and was ready to go, we signed up for the next puppy course at a local training club. The course took place on a farm on weekday evenings, where we'd train indoors in a big barn during bad weather or outside in a field on warmer evenings. Our instructor, a former police dog handler/trainer, led the sessions, and at the end of the 8-week course, an independent KC representative would come to conduct the nerve-racking tests. The classes usually had between 8-10 dogs and handlers in, although that got less and less the further up the levels we went as people either repeated previous levels due to not passing the test or chose not to continue progressing.

When we first arrived, it was clear that some of the other handlers didn't think we'd last or succeed—but Roxie proved them wrong! She was so clever and eager to please!

Wind, rain, snow, sleet – nothing deterred us or slowed us down, we were out in all weathers training, training, training! She loved training and would get excited whenever she knew we were going to class (probably because it meant lots of treats!).

In fact, she excelled so much that she flew through the courses and aced every test. By the time she was 1, she had completed the full progression from Puppy to Gold!

Puppy Foundation

This course lays the foundations for early learning and assists new puppy owners in understanding basic training techniques. Enrolment can take place from 8 weeks of age, depending on the club and course completion up to 12 months of age.

This course includes things like basic handling and inspection, short puppy recall, basic positions, a short stay and controlled walking on a lead



Bronze

The bronze award aims to produce a dog that will walk and behave in a controlled manner. It is a basic standard that all adult dogs can achieve with correct handling. Owners must show that they have means of picking up after their dog and that their dog is wearing a lead and collar with the name and the address of the owner inscribed on the collar/disc to take part.

This course includes things like controlled walking amongst other dogs/people, a longer stay, grooming without a struggle and a longer recall.



Silver

The silver award aims to build on the skills learned in the bronze award while increasing the level of difficulty. It is a natural progression of practical dog training skills and introduces new concepts such as greeting a friend, vehicle control and a road walking exercise which are vital in everyday life situations.



Gold

The gold award is the highest level of achievement within the scheme awards. It builds upon the skills learnt in the silver award and develops more advanced training skills of the dog and handler. The gold award introduces new concepts such as sending a dog to bed, relaxed isolation, an emergency stop and heelwork off the lead, all of which provide greater understanding and control.



Loki with his certificates.

The Japanese Spitz is an incredibly intelligent breed, and in my experience, they thrive in and really enjoy training, quickly picking up new skills.

11 years after Roxie, I welcomed puppy Loki into my life, eager to train him to the same high standards as Roxie.

Little did I know, he would prove to be a much more challenging pupil! While equally intelligent, he was far more rebellious. He understood what needed to be done but often chose *when* he wanted to do it! Despite his more challenging nature, Loki still excelled at each level and test. He would walk perfectly to heel, on and off the lead, ignoring the other dogs and distractions around. However once he passed the test and received his certificate, he'd pull me eagerly back to the car, looking to greet every dog we passed along the way!

Training Loki was certainly more demanding than training Roxie, as he was far more easily distracted. While Roxie was focused entirely on me and had little interest in other people or dogs, Loki could be distracted by the smallest things—a leaf blowing in the wind, for instance! So, while both dogs were equally intelligent, Loki required a lot more attention and effort from me during training. Nevertheless, he still passed every level on his first attempt, although we had a lot more homework to work on between classes to achieve that.

At 13, just two weeks before she sadly passed, Roxie took the Gold course again and still passed with flying colours, showing that even in her later years, her enthusiasm and intelligence never wavered. Despite being slower and a bit unwell by that point, she still enjoyed the classes, the tests, and was as eager to please as ever.



One thing I've learnt through my experiences with both dogs is that repetition and persistence are absolutely key. Training Roxie to the highest possible standard made our life together incredibly rewarding and effortless. I always knew that no matter the situation, I could rely on her to behave appropriately and follow my commands. It was a true testament to the bond we had built over time, and it made every shared moment even more enjoyable.

With Loki, who is now nearly 3 years old, the rebellious streak is still very much present. While I don't think I'll ever be able to train it out of him entirely, he is still an absolute joy to work with. His boundless energy and playful spirit make every training session feel like an adventure. Despite his more challenging nature, he continues to surprise me with how quickly he picks up skills, even if it's on his own terms. A very happy, little bouncing boy indeed!

Beyond the official training classes, I also taught both dogs a variety of fun tricks and activities. Roxie, ever the performer, could jump through a hoop and even "moonwalk" with style! Loki, on the other hand, had a natural love for agility, effortlessly navigating courses, and he enjoys showing off his tricks like giving a paw or spinning on command.

Each of them had their own unique talents and personalities, making our training sessions even more enjoyable and rewarding.

I used treats as positive reinforcement for both Roxie and Loki during their training, even though many modern classes now recommend clicker training. While I respect that method, it wasn't for me. I stuck with what I knew would work best for my two dogs, and it paid off. In terms of personality, Roxie and Loki were polar opposites, yet when it came to intelligence, they were both equally sharp. Despite their differences, I had no real issues training either of them.

I would highly recommend obedience classes and courses to anyone who is serious about training their dog. Not only does it make life with your pet much easier, but it's also something they really enjoy. Putting in the effort early on reaps significant rewards in the long term, helping create a stronger bond and a well-behaved companion who can handle almost any situation.

The time and effort I've invested in training Roxie and Loki has been incredibly rewarding. Their unique personalities have brought so much joy into my life, and the skills we worked on together have strengthened our bond. Whether you have a dog that's eager to please or one with a bit of a rebellious streak, consistent training and patience will always pay off. So, if you're looking to create a lasting, positive relationship with your furry friend, I can't recommend dog obedience training classes enough. They not only help you shape your dog's behaviour but also deepen the connection you share, making life together all the more enjoyable.

And the best part? After all that training, I've never have to worry about my dogs running off at the park 😊 . Loki might still eagerly want to play with every dog we see, but at least I can count on him to come back when I call—most of the time!

