

Canine Sports: Baron, 2003 Highest Ranked Shiloh in Obedience--Interview with Lorelle Jones



1. First, can you please explain all of Baron's titles and what they mean as well as his current rankings?

Baron's official name is UUD Baron Adelig von Zion AMBOR UD. UUD is "United Kennel Club Utility Dog," AMBOR UD is American Mixed Breed Obedience Registry Utility Dog." Obedience is divided into three levels of competition: Novice, Open, and Utility. Only the highest title earned by a dog is part of his name, so in order to be a Utility Dog Baron

had to first earn his Novice (CD or Companion Dog) and Open (CDX or Companion Dog Excellent) titles. Baron is ranked in the top five in AMBOR's Open rankings for 2003. This means he is one of the top five AMBOR registered dogs competing at the Open level for the year. He is the number 2 AMBOR dog at the Utility level! Each title is earned by passing a series of exercises in at least three trials. Each pass is called a "leg," and three legs earns a title. So, Baron had to pass Novice level exercises three times to earn his CD, Open level exercises three times to earn his CDX, and Utility level exercises three times to earn his UD title.

2. What made you decide to train Baron in obedience?

I started competing in Obedience with Grafin, my Rottweiler. When we decided to get a Shiloh Shepherd, I told my husband that I wanted one that would do well in Obedience, because I loved the training and the competition.

3. How much time do you spend training per week?

It really varies a lot. When I'm teaching a new exercise, I train at least a little bit every day if possible (it might only be 15 minutes--less for a puppy). Now that Baron knows the exercises and we are in the "polishing" stage, I try to train him three days a week for 30 minutes to an hour. I'm still training Grafin too, so double that time for me! I also take classes with at least one dog each week--the class lasts about an hour.

4. Describe an average training session?

Wow--that could take several chapters! We always begin with a little bit of heeling on leash--just a warm-up and a reminder to him that we are "working." I try and set goals for my training--often several small goals. For example, right now I'm concentrating on making sure Baron's "fronts" and "finishes" (at the end of each exercise the dog must sit directly in front of the handler and then move back to heel position) are straight, and we're working on speeding up some of the other exercises. A typical training session would include heeling, then I would do each Utility exercise (the signal exercise, the scent discrimination, the glove retrieves, the drop on recall and straight recall, and the directed jumping.) With each one I encourage him to move quickly and I help him get straight on his fronts and finishes. Then I might bring out the dumbbell and toss it for a

few retrieves. Finally, he gets to play with a stuffed toy as a release. I reward with food some, and with praise a lot. For Baron, I correct almost entirely with my voice and facial expressions, although when he was learning the exercises I used some force, including a pinch collar.

5. Where did you get your jumps?

Mine are from J&J. They are Practijumps and are made of PVC and vinyl siding. They come apart easily and store in their own bag. I was lucky and found a used set for \$50, but I believe they are about \$200 new. For anyone ordering jumps--watch for a dog show in your area and check to see if J&J will be there--it will save on the shipping. Also, I highly recommend the 4-foot wide jumps. Some shows use 5-foot wide, but 4 foot is much more common.

6. What organizations do you compete with?

Baron and I compete in UKC and AMBOR. UKC allows any breed or mix, and AMBOR is for mixed breeds and allows rare breeds, since ARBA (American Rare Breed Association) doesn't have Obedience or Agility. AMBOR allows dogs to earn titles at fun matches, but I know that for me the tension level is not the same, and the judging often isn't as qualified, so all of Baron's titles were earned at UKC Trials. I have also competed in AKC and Canadian Obedience with Grafyn, but neither organization allows Shilohs. The last I heard Baron was still the only Shiloh with UKC and/or AMBOR Obedience titles.

7. Does Baron enjoy training? What motivates him?

I think that Baron DOES enjoy training. He loves to be with me, and he gets excited when he sees the gear bag. Play, praise, and food are all motivators for him, so he's very easy to work with. In contrast, Grafyn really is only motivated by food.

8. Have you noticed any change in Baron's behavior or attitude since you started training in obedience?

That would be hard to tell since his Obedience training began immediately after we got him. I believe that he is more confident away from home as a result of this training. And, I know that the training is in part responsible for him being much less fearful around new people and in new places. Baron has always been the "I did it and lived" dog--once he's done something, been somewhere, seen something and survived, the next time is much less traumatic!

9. What is the most frustrating thing about training in obedience?

Oddly enough I'm not usually frustrated. I like to break things down into small pieces and seek success in equally small bites. Maybe my dog didn't do the entire exercise correctly, but perhaps he did a perfect front or finish. You learn to be patient and to celebrate small successes!

10. What is your favorite part about training in obedience?

I love the opportunity to bond with my dogs by traveling with them, and I really enjoy the chance to spend time with a variety of people who have this common interest.

11. What is your long-term goal for Baron as far as competition goes?

I hope to earn his UKC Obedience Championship (U-OCH) and his AMBOR Utility Dog Excellent (UDX) titles. He's already 60 percent of the way done with the UDX, so that one is within our reach. A UDX requires the dog to pass both Open and Utility ten times in a single Trial. Baron has done this 6 times and come very close two other times. The U-OCH requires passing Open and Utility 5 times with combined scores of 370 out of 400 and earning points from Open and Utility totaling 100. Baron has about 40 points, but he has never gotten a combined score of 370 (we have a 369 and a 369.5 so it is close!). I'd like to get this title too, but it will be much harder for us. I am also trying to put an AKC Utility Dog title on Grafyn, and I hope to apply to become a UKC Obedience judge later this year.

12. Looking back over Baron's obedience career to date, to what do you feel you owe most of his success?

I owe much of Baron's success in the Obedience ring to our trainer and friend Sheryl. She helped me through many rough spots and was always confident that Baron would be able to do this (or at least Sheryl acted confident in front of me) successfully. I think back to a puppy that was scared of his own shadow, wouldn't let anyone except Dave and I touch him, and jumped at EVERY little noise, and I look at him today and realize just how far we've come. I may have done the training, but without the knowledge, insight, and support of Sheryl and a whole bunch of other "dog people," Baron would definitely not work the way he does today.

13. What advice would you give to people interested in training or competing in obedience?

I would say that the keys to training are patience and perseverance. You have to be willing to go at the pace of your dog, which might be very slow, and you have to be willing to keep trying other things if one doesn't work. Some dogs learn quickly (Baron did!) and then you need to be ready to teach something else to avoid boredom and loss of interest. Read books, watch videos, go to a show or two, get involved in a local club - if you want to compete you'll want to do all of these!