

■ F U N D O G

Pooch-friendly FITNESS CLASSES

Looking for a way to make exercise more fun for you and your pooch? Fortunately, you don't have to, thanks to a trend in combating canine — and human — obesity: fitness clubs for dogs.

Take, for instance, K9 Fit Club. Started in 2008, the Illinois-based chain expects to have 13 clubs in place by June. What's fueling its popularity? The fun factor. "We don't do anything negative here," says Tricia Montgomery, K9 Fit Club founder, adding that if anybody says anything negative about their weight there, they have to put a dollar in the jar. That money is then donated to local animal shelters. "For people and their pets, we're all about paw-sitive reinforcement," she says.

For people, the 55-minute fitness classes typically include cardio, strength training, and stretching, and while dogs get in on the action, they also receive obedience training. Each club has a staff that includes veterinarians, dog trainers, and personal trainers. People and dogs are even given a physical assessment before they take their first class.

And the weight is coming off. For instance, at Thank Dog Bootcamp, which is headquartered in Burbank, Calif., and con-



tinuing to expand to other cities around the country, one dog owner lost 60 pounds. It's a scenario founder Jill Bowers sees frequently. "The most common duo is a person who wants to lose weight and a dog who needs work on behavioral problems," she says, adding that there are plenty of overweight dogs who enroll in the classes, too.

While these classes might sound like an unpleasant task, they can be fun. "Because of the way we do cardio, combining obedience with running around with dogs, exercise is no longer a chore," Bowers says. "Although it's challenging, it's fun to exercise with your dog, which is one of the biggest reasons people stick with the program."

Another bonus? You can build a stronger bond with your dog. "Unlike a typical dog walk, where a person might be talking on their phone and ignoring their dog, our classes are very interactive," says Dawn Celapino, founder of Leash Your Fitness in San Diego, which offers fitness classes for people and their pooches, as well as trail running, yoga, surfing, kayaking, and hiking.

If you don't live near one of these classes, you can create your own workout with your dog. On your next walk or run, stop every few minutes, give your dog a command, and then do pushups, jumping jacks, or lunges, Bowers says. Or check out Thank Dog's iPhone app at www.thankdogmobile.com. It will put you and your dog through one-hour workouts using voice commands and is set to your favorite music. — K.A.