Porter, a 10-month-old dog, drives around a racetrack.

Driving Dogs

Would you adopt a dog if you knew it could drive? One dog shelter hopes you will!

By Elizabeth Aaron

Something doggone strange is happening in an animal shelter in New Zealand. Dogs are getting into cars and driving! How is this possible? And why?

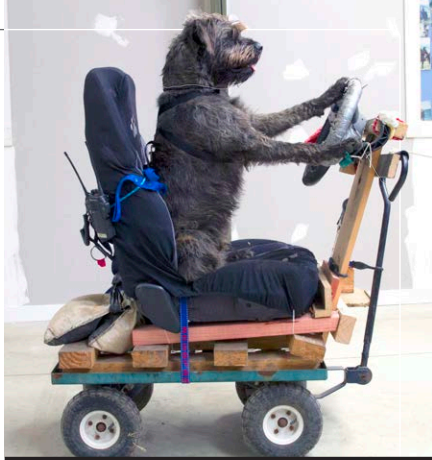
It all started with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). The SPCA is a group that works to keep animals safe. They take in dogs that are abandoned or have been abused, and work to find them new homes with caring people. One day, the group realized they had too many dogs at the shelter. Only a few of the pooches were being adopted! What was the reason?

The SPCA realized that many people love intelligent pets. But they believe that dogs in shelters aren't very smart compared to those found in pet stores or raised by breeders. So, they often buy dogs instead of adopting ones who need homes. The SPCA wanted to do something about this. They wanted to prove to everyone that shelter dogs are smart—by teaching them to drive!

Behind the Wheel

Before they could begin, SPCA trainers had to develop a car that a dog could drive. They started by creating a gas pedal and steering wheel that could accommodate a dog's large furry paws. They also made sure the car would not exceed five miles per hour.

The next step was to train the dogs. Three dogs—Ginny, Monty, and Porter—were placed on a rig, or model of the car. The rig helped familiarize the dogs with car controls. SPCA trainers then pulled the rig so that the dogs could get used to the movement. They didn't want the dogs getting carsick!



The dogs practiced driving on a rig before getting into a car.

Once the dogs learned the controls, they were ready for the real thing. The dogs started driving the real car while a trainer walked beside them. As the dogs drove, the trainer gave them commands. The commands included *brake*, *accelerate*, and *turn*. One dog—Monty—was so good, he got to drive with a human passenger.

The Road Ahead

Monty and his furry friends proved that even stray or abandoned dogs are smart creatures. Since the experiment, the SPCA has gotten many calls about adopting their shelter animals. They are confident that dogs will find homes with caring owners.

And that's not the only good news. These three dogs now hold the Guinness World Record for First Driving Dogs. Now, that's something to shout—or bark—about. Woof!

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