

## HOP SCOTCH

by Lee Netzler

Sometimes during the training of a dog an unusual problem will arise. It's the kind of problem that has no ready remedy, and where the handler, as a last resort, must attempt to outsmart the dog. The odds favor the dog.

My chance to solve a special problem came with my first Scottie after four months of training. During heeling he began to retract one hind leg and skip a step. Gradually he trotted less and skipped more. He heeled well, except for his erratic skips, which with sufficient practice, he developed into a smooth little hop. As his heeling improved, his hopping increased, and before long he could hop through an "about turn" in perfect synchronization. Then came the bad news—a lame dog could not compete at a trial, and my dog appeared to exhibit lameness.

At this startling discovery I promptly took him to the veterinarian. After a careful examination the vet disclosed that previously he suffered what was the equivalent of pulling a tendon in his kneecap. This condition created an uncomfortable feeling, although there was no pain, and caused the dog to favor one leg. He assured me it should correct itself, and if it did not, suggested we see him again later. I left his office greatly relieved.

We continued to train as usual. The dog's trot, trot, hippety-hop, hippety hop, trot, trot, was a familiar sight in obedience class. He became adept at heeling and could even change pace smoothly—hippety, hippity, hop,hop,hop,hop, for a fast heel, and hippety, hippety h o p, h o p, h o p, for a slow heel. Unfortunately, his condition did not improve, so after a few months we returned to our veterinarian.

The vet examined him, X-rayed him, and kept him overnight for observation. He couldn't find a thing wrong. Anxiously I discussed the problem with him. He believed that after the dog's kneecap healed, he just kept hopping from habit. Moreover, it appeared that the dog had learned to enjoy his unique talent and that now he hopped for the sheer pleasure of it. So, the problem was to somehow cure him of hopping for fun. I left the vet's office relieved but less optimistic.

The way things were going, he would hop to his grave. I finally decided to have it out with him once and for all. I took him to the driveway and we began heeling. As soon as he hopped, I reached down and firmly tapped his retracted and commanded: "NO HOP!" Was he surprised. He looked at me as if I were tampering with his Divine Right. We continued the heeling practice for twenty more minutes, and I nearly cured him right then and there. We kept up his unusual "training therapy" and went to trial a few weeks later. He only hopped twice in the ring throughout the entire novice exercises.

He still enjoys a few hops every once in a while. I don't say anything to him about it, though. I like to think he is cured, but he is entitled to his pride.