

north shore news

Mountain bikers help train jumpy dog

[Joan Klucha](#) / North Shore News

February 8, 2015 12:00 AM

I still recall my youthful years of biking the trails on the North Shore mountains.

Since then, I've sold my Brodie (mountain bike) and bought a Tex (quarter horse).

My equine adventures have taken me abroad and the sure-footedness of my mount has allowed me to see some amazing countryside. But this past weekend my appreciation for the local mountains was renewed.

I wasn't on horseback, but was working with a dog that has some issues with mountain bikes. Prior to this day, we had been working for almost a year on behavioural management and leadership skills along with socialization and desensitization to bikes. Now it was time to put the hard work to the test.

I met Sylvester (not his real name) and his owner at the beginning of the trail at 11:30 a.m. The trail entrance was lined with mountain bikers. When Sylvester got out of the vehicle, he immediately went into prey drive, focusing his attention intently on the moving objects - in this case the mountain bikers. We patiently waited for him to calm down and, to my surprise, some of the mountain bikers seemed to know we were training and offered to ride by slowly to help. In the past, the sound of spinning wheels would trigger Sylvester's prey drive so swiftly that he would pull his owner off her feet as he chased down the bikers. Within a few minutes of the bikes moving slowly around him, Sylvester was calm enough to walk the trails. I smiled a silent "thank you" to those two guys who helped us out.

We took a trail that was a series of switchbacks up the hill. This was a designated hiking trail and we did not come across one mountain biker on our ascent up the mountain. We intentionally took this trail to tire Sylvester out a bit before we got into the serious training.

Once we joined the Baden Powell Trail and our descent began we started to run into our quarry for the day, mountain bikers. Sylvester could hear the wheels approaching from behind and began to get agitated. We moved him off to the side and into a sit to allow the bikers to pass. To my surprise, the bikers stopped and waited for us to get Sylvester settled. When Sylvester began to get aroused as the bikes started to move, a rider asked us, "Are you training him? How can I help? I love dogs, I have a big guy like this at home and wish I could bring him along the ride with me but it's not safe for him."

I smiled and said, "You guys are awesome, and yes, it would be so great if you could just ride by slowly while he gets calm." And they did, every one of them! The young man who offered to help even got off his bike and gave Sylvester a big rub behind the ears which just made Sylvester's day! We carried on our hike along the Baden Powell and came across a sort of mountain bikers' meeting place. There were a bunch of them hanging out on their bikes and some were riding through. It was a perfect place for training. We walked towards a group of bikers leaning against their bikes and had Sylvester sit at a distance from them for a few seconds when one the of the young gals asked if we were doing some training and invited us over. "This is amazing!" I thought to myself.

Sylvester got excited as we approached, but when the bikers came up to him to say hello his demeanor changed from prey drive to play. We stood there chatting about dogs, people and bikes for a good 15 minutes while Sylvester investigated the bikes, the riders, their helmets and soon ignored the bikes passing by. We made our way out to the street and were again engulfed by bikers, but by this time Sylvester didn't care. One rider asked if he could say hello and Sylvester obliged by giving him a slobbery face lick, which he laughed off. We had a fantastic training day, all due to the genuine helpfulness and kindness of the mountain bikers and I wish to say thank you. You have no idea how much you helped Sylvester and his owner.

Joan Klucha has been working with dogs for more than 15 years in obedience, tracking and behavioural rehabilitation. Visit her website: k9kinship.com.