

Don't Lose Your Cool

Ask any knowledgeable Weimaraner owner to describe our breed's characteristics and you'll get a list that includes words like, "...active, energetic, athletic, and persistent." The AKC's website adds the words, "... great speed, fearlessness and endurance," Yes, Weimaraners are one of the jocks of the dog world.

All this is well and good but it can also be a formula for disaster in hot weather.

We all know not to leave a dog in a closed car when the temperatures rise but it's some of the borderline situations that can also put your dog in harm's way. For example, it's only 70 degrees and you just need a few things from the supermarket. You close up the car, run in, find what you want, make your way through the checkout line and are back to the car in 20 minutes. Guess what? The interior of a closed car can reach almost 100 degrees while it's only a 70 degree day. Surprised?

Then there's the scenario of taking your dog for a run on a summer day. As temperatures rise and you're exercising your dog, you start to sweat. You rationalize that your dog is big and tough and needs a good run. By now you're pushing on and sweating up a storm. Guess what? Your dog isn't prepared to do the same. Dogs have notoriously poor cooling systems. Humans dissipate heat with sweat glands that are generously distributed all over our bodies. Dogs only have their mouths, noses and pads to let off heat.

I'm not saying that we should curtail exercise in the hot weather but we need to do it wisely and recognize that our breed is more mentally predisposed to all-out exertion than they are physically.

Regardless of the conditioning, drive, youth and stamina of a given dog, when the dog's internal temperature peaks at 104 degrees you have heat exhaustion. When internal temperature reaches 106 degrees we're talking about heat stroke.

What warning signs should you know? We've already talked about internal temperature, there's also excessive panting, gums turn a dark red and the mucous membranes of the mouth feel dry and tacky. Hyperventilation from heavy panting leads to further dehydration. Behaviorally, a dog can initially be

hyperactive, anxious and excitable. If the condition worsens there's disorientation, lying down, inability to get up, collapse and loss of consciousness.

What should you do if you suspect that your dog is in trouble? The obvious thing is to get your dog out of the heat. Seek shade, an air-conditioned space, or anything that will lessen the surrounding temperature. Cool, wet compresses should be applied around the head, leg armpits and groin. One caution, don't dunk the dog in ice cold water. If water is too cold it will cause blood vessel constriction and actually will cause the internal temperature to rise. Beware of draping the dog in wet towels unless they are frequently changed – if wet towels are left in place they can actually trap in heat. Offer small amounts of cool drinking water. Contact a vet and seek advice.

I'm not advocating an air-conditioned glass bubble for our Weimaraners. We all know that they crave exercise and that proper, safe exertion is key for keeping our dogs healthy and happy. Get out and enjoy the warmer weather but let's make sure we know the limitations of our dogs' less than perfect ability to keep at a safe, internal temperature.

Carole Lee Richards

PO Box 516, Collingswood, NJ08108

ymar_column@yahoo.com