

Around the Obedience Ring, *continued*

dog will regard it as a "room of his own." It is a clean, comfortable, safe place to leave your dog when he cannot be supervised. Most dogs will try not to urinate or defecate in the crate, which is why it is so invaluable for housebreaking.

There are many types of crates, both plastic and metal, as well as varied opinions about how to introduce your dog to his crate, placement, bedding, food and toys, etc. The bottom line is, what makes you comfortable?



Photo 2: Keep the crate door open for the first few meals and let him wander in and out. Note that this crate "fits" the puppy's size.

A small puppy does not need a large crate, so you don't need to have a permanent place to put it. Just as most of us loathe laying down a new infant and listening to it scream, you probably won't want to listen to your new puppy howl in his crate. There are few noises more pitiful than a mourning puppy that has been shut in his crate before he was ready for a nap. To introduce your dog to the crate, place the crate in a "people" area such as the kitchen or family room. What looks comfortable to you? If your puppy seems hot-natured, and the metal crate pan is cool, you may not want to put anything in the crate. If you think an old towel or blanket makes it look more appealing, then put one in there for bedding. Put your puppy's toys and a few treats in the open crate and allow him to come and go as he wishes. At mealtimes, feed your puppy in the crate. Young puppies are sometimes slow to eat, so the first few meals you may keep the crate door open and let him wander in and out (photo 2). When your puppy's appetite improves, feed him with the door closed and let him out when he's fin-

ished. (Clean up any spills promptly – it's very important for the crate to stay clean!) Your puppy doesn't need to stay in his crate long, but he will become comfortable eating his meal there.

The real trick is to put your puppy in the crate when he is tired and ready for a nap. The first few nights always produce a bit of anxiety, so after taking your puppy out and playing with him until he seems ready for bed, slip him in his crate and turn out the lights. If you had planned to put the crate in a room other than your bedroom, he may cry, and you'll have to decide if you can stand it. However, there is nothing wrong with slipping him in his crate next to your bed, turning out the light, and dangling your fingers through the side or door of the crate to comfort him as the two of you drift off to sleep.

If your puppy wakes you up at any time in the night, you must get up and take him out. It's important that he learns that you will help him keep his crate clean. There is no need to play with him or feed him, simply let him go to the bathroom, and then return him to his crate.

When you put him back in the crate, he may fuss, and you are faced with a decision. If you take him to bed with you, he will quickly learn that waking you up gets him a reward, namely the rest of the night in your bed. You should probably try to ignore him, but again, if you are soft hearted and can't stand the whining, having the crate next to your bed where you can comfort him may be the best decision for you.

Can you ever sleep with your puppy, or allow him to nap with you? Sure. However, balance that with having him sleep in his crate. Remember your overall goal is to teach him to be confined when necessary. As he gets older, you may not use the crate to confine him. You may just want to shut him in a bedroom or out in the yard while you entertain. This is the age to begin teaching him to be confined without complaining about it.

Years ago, my husband and I raised a Doberman puppy who was horrible about crying and whining in her crate. We slept with the crate near our bed, and she would whine continually. We tried the crate in another room with no luck. It didn't seem to matter how tired she was when we put her in the crate, the whining began as soon as the door

was shut. Finally, in desperation, we put the crate in the car in the garage and went to bed. We're not sure how long she whined the first night; fortunately we couldn't hear her, nor could the neighbors. By the third night, she had given up her tantrums, and we were able to bring the crate back in the house. She was finally convinced that sometimes she would have to sleep quietly when confined.

Between seven and nine weeks, it is probably a good idea to let your puppy sleep in the crate all night, eat his meals in the crate, and stay in the crate whenever you have to leave him. This may seem like a lot of "crate time," but try to remember that this is only for the short term, until your puppy gets a little older. Furthermore, a puppy at this age takes a lot of naps, and that is what he will learn to do whenever he is in the crate.

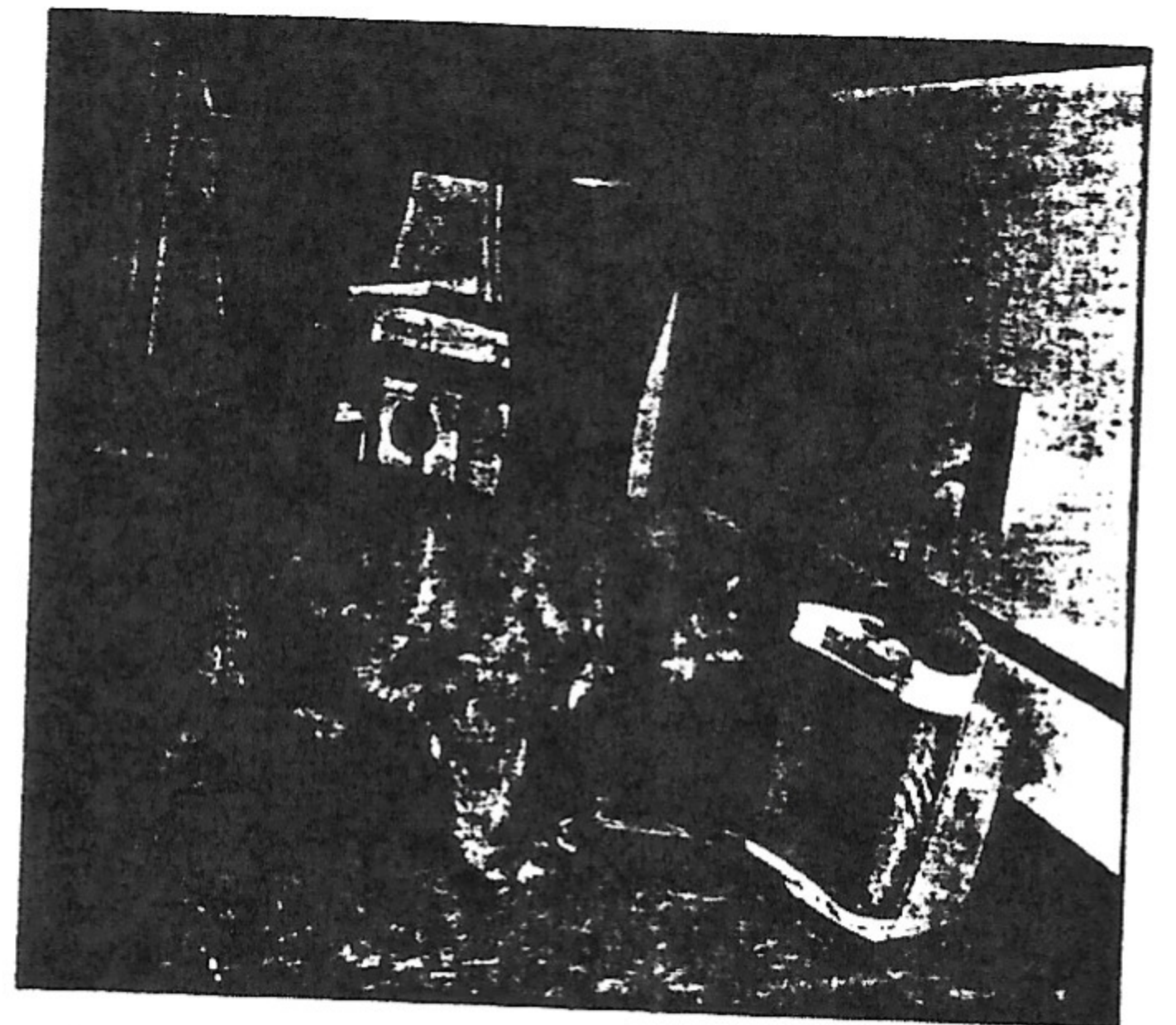


Photo 3: An inquisitive puppy gets into trouble when left alone.

When your puppy is comfortable with his crate, how long can he stay in his crate before he will need to go outside? Ideally, when he wakes from his nap and cries, you will be there to take him outside. However, the answer to this question may well be dictated by your lifestyle. No one wants to leave a puppy alone all day, however you may not have an option if you are working full time. If that is the case, you may do better to put your puppy in a large crate, with the front half holding bedding, and the back half covered in papers so that your puppy uses the back as a bathroom if he must relieve himself while you are gone. This is probably a safer option than leaving him loose in a small room in your house where he could chew a piece of furniture or electric cord (photo 3).