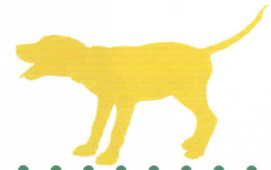


Run, Bella, Run

Black Lab inspires the
running community



In Their Debt

by Jen Reeder

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After 15 years of competing in marathons, Elizabeth Morgan hit the wall while training to qualify for the Boston Marathon. Her workouts were intense, but due to injuries and inclement weather, she wasn't achieving her time goals.

"I just got really, really burned out," she said. "I didn't want to quit, but I knew if I didn't change something, that's what was going to happen. I needed to find my love of running

again. So I started researching dogs to run with."

The consensus on the Internet for the best running dogs: Labs. So one morning in 2015, Morgan scouted the website of her local animal shelter – the Vanderburgh Humane Society in Evansville, Indiana – and saw a photo of a six-month-old Lab puppy named Bella.

"I got the kids in the car," she said. "We went down there, and I knew when I met her that she was going to be the perfect running partner."

She was right. The high energy level that shelter employees thought could have led to Bella being euthanized turned out to be ideal for long distance training. Morgan made sure to discuss training plans and nutrition with her veterinarian to keep Bella

healthy (which she still does). Now Morgan and Bella run 35-45 miles each week and have competed in numerous races together, including 11 half-marathons and one full marathon.

Morgan checks with race directors prior to entering to get permission to run with her Lab and arrange for water breaks during the races. The friendly dog loves it when there are children volunteering at water stops and will drink from the cups they offer.

"The kids go crazy over her," she said. "Other runners like her, and the spectators love her. I used to run with earbuds in. I actually have to take an earbud out so I can hear all the comments."

The two have been successful together, even winning "Best Overall Female" in one race. Every time Morgan gets a medal, Bella gets one, too, so now the dog has her own medal shelf at home.

Of course, the Lab doesn't run for trophies – she runs because she loves it. The three a.m. training runs to avoid the heat of the day are great, but competitions are her favorite.

"Our routine is different on race day, so she gets absolutely excited. Barking, ready to get in the car, wagging her tail," Morgan said. "It's really fun."

The biggest challenge is when there are other dogs around the race course and Bella wants to play with them. Morgan will encourage her to stay focused by saying, "Run, Bella, run." Afterward, the Lab might nap for an hour or so but then is ready to play fetch with Morgan's children, Taylor, 10, and Tessa, 8.

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"Bella's not just a running dog. She's a family dog, too," Morgan said. "She's wonderful. I can't imagine my life without her."

Because adopting Bella has made such a positive impact on her life, Morgan created a Facebook group and campaign called "Run Bella Run to the Rescue." The goal is to raise awareness that high-energy dogs can make terrific companions, inspire people to be active with dogs, and fundraise for the shelter that rescued Bella.

She's off to a great start. Before competing in the Shawnee Marathon on October 26, 2017, Morgan presented the Vanderburgh Humane Society with a check for \$3,200. In response, the mayor of Evansville proclaimed the day "Run Bella Run to the Rescue Day."

Now Bella and Morgan represent the clothing company Gone for a Run at races, and the company donates 20 percent of sales from their Running Dog line to Run Bella Run to the Rescue when customers use the code "Run Bella Run." The singlet Morgan wears in races features a dog with a leash in her mouth and the phrase "Never run alone" – which Morgan said is good advice for runners, particularly women.

"Labs are great running partners," she said. "It doesn't matter how fast or how slow you run, they pretty much are a faithful companion and will stick by your side until you get to the finish line."

Runner Carrie Newman said Morgan has always been supportive of other runners, and that the running community



Before You Run Your Lab

Before you start a new running regimen with your Lab, be sure to visit your veterinarian and discuss your plans so that you can take precautions to keep your dog healthy and happy. In addition to discussing ways to prevent dehydration and paw injuries (avoid running on hot pavement!) and how to gradually increase distances, you'll want to check for certain conditions to avoid issues.

Heather Loenser, DVM and Senior Veterinary Officer for American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), said large breed dogs like Labs should be checked for:

- Laryngeal paralysis: "This is a weakening of the mechanism that opens and closes the airway, which causes the dog not to be able to efficiently regulate their body temperature through panting," she says. "It is one of the main causes of heat stroke in older, large breed dogs."
- Early signs of arthritis: "Most pet owners can identify when their dog is limping, but many don't realize that 'slowing down' is not a sign of aging, but of arthritis. Dogs benefit from slow leash walks to maintain muscle mass, but long runs might cause undue pain."
- Body condition score: "With over fifty percent of dogs being overweight, it would be very inspiring to see a dog lose weight by starting a running program. Your vet can help you understand what your dog's ideal weight should be and give you a target."

Loenser noted that it's always important to monitor your Lab during workouts. "If you are on a long run and realize your dog is struggling, you can find an AAHA-accredited hospital near you by visiting AAHA.org/locate on your smartphone."



has embraced Bella. She added that they're impressive competitors.

"The last race we were at together was a St. Patrick's Day race; they were right in front of me, so I was always trying to keep up with them," she recalled. "They are very fast."

Newman said it's clear Morgan and her dog share a close relationship, and she admires the awareness the two are generating.

"Elizabeth has gained a lot of friends not only in the running community, but those who are really into rescue and who see how significant that can be for not only the person's life but the animal's life," she said. "Animals just provide so much in our lives. It's really wonderful."

Runner Lisa Foster has enjoyed seeing Bella and Morgan at races and agreed that they are "pretty quick."

"Bella definitely seems to enjoy it. She's always got a smile on her face," Foster said. "She's an awesome dog."

In fact, Foster hopes to have a canine running partner of her own in the

future. She said she's inspired by the way Morgan has helped Bella channel her energy in a productive way, and that it's sad to think a dog like Bella could have been euthanized for being too energetic. She's glad "Run Bella Run to the Rescue" is highlighting the joys of adopting an active dog.

"I would really hope that Elizabeth's campaign reaches a lot of lives and a lot of hearts," she said. "I think what she has done is fantastic."



For more information, visit:

www.facebook.com/Run-Bella-Run-To-The-Rescue-278078796010235.



Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder is president of the Dog Writers Association of America. She became a self-proclaimed "crazy dog lady" after she and her husband adopted a

lovable Lab mix named Rio. Visit her online at www.JenReeder.com.