



Stella keeps quiet thanks to the PetSafe Spray Bark Control collar. (By Mary Ann Gerth, The Courier-Journal)

The Best Dog silencer
Pssst: Collar curbs howling

By Joseph Gerth

Who does a mean Brando impersonation

For the longest time, my neighbors must have thought they lived next door to Marlon Brando. Each night, I'd stand on the patio and cry out the same name over and over. STELLA!

But it wasn't unrequited love I was wailing about. It was a crazy beagle that loved nothing more than to howl at the moon. Or anything that moved.

That was before my neighbor mentioned to my wife, "Don't they make collars that would stop that?"

So the next Saturday I went in search of something that might curtail Stella's nightly performance.

I first consulted with a veterinarian about what was the best type of device to stop this

antisocial behavior.

It seems there are basically three types of devices found in many pet stores.

They all strap to the dog's neck and a sensor feels vibration in the dog's throat when she starts to bark. They produce stimuli designed to coerce the big-mouth bowwow to shut up.

One lets out a high-pitched sound that you can't hear but the dog can. The next sends a jolt of electricity into the dog when she starts to howl. The third sprays a fine mist of citronella up at the dog's face.

Our vet had heard that the citronella collars and the mini-shock-therapy devices worked and wouldn't harm the dog. She wasn't sure how effective the high-pitched sound would be.

So off to the PetSmart on Westport Road I went.

The clerk recommended against the shock device. Beagles live to bark, he reasoned, and something like that might confuse her and make her mad.

That's the last thing I needed. Stella had already taken a chunk out of my lip during one of her angry outbursts.

If that wasn't enough to dissuade me, the shock collar, with two big electrodes, looked downright Draconian.

I decided on the PetSafe Spray Bark Control Collar. It wasn't cheap -- \$119.99 before taxes -- but it seemed the most humane and to have the best chance of working and preserving peace in the neighborhood. (I've seen it for less on the Internet.) You can buy citronella refills for about \$10.

I took it home and put in the batteries. Just to make sure it worked -- and not wanting to do something to one of my dogs I wouldn't do to myself (except for neutering, of course), I stuck it to my own throat and gave it a go. "Woo-woo-woo-woo."

Psssst.

A shot of mist with the unmistakable smell of citronella slammed into my chin. I was a walking No-Pest Strip.

But the question was, would it work on a dog? I fashioned the collar to fit around Stella's neck and strapped it on.

She initially fought it. She didn't like the unit, about an inch square, hanging on her neck.

But she got used to it quickly.

Then the big test. I took her outside where Carl, our neighbor, was with a dog his wife, Joyce, had just brought home from the Oldham County dog pound.

Stella saw the little black pup and let out a howl.

Pssst.

She stopped barking immediately, ran about four steps and started sniffing the ground where she had been. She had a "What was that?" look.

We're hoping that over time, we'll be able to ween her off the collar and she'll instinctively know not to bark. She stayed quiet on a 20-minute trip to the backyard without the collar on just her third day of training.

But for now, if the neighbors want Marlon Brando, they'll have to rent a movie.

Submit! What do you think is "The Best"? If we publish your submission, you'll get 40 bucks and all the fame you can stand. Address submissions, with your address and daytime phone number, to Jena Monahan, "Best" Editor, The Courier-Journal, P.O. Box 740031, Louisville, KY 40201-7431. E-mail her at jmonahan@courier-journal.com.

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