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Dog Photography FOR **DUMMIES®**

by Kim Rodgers and Sarah Sypniewski
Co-founders of Bark Pet Photography



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About the Authors

Kim Rodgers and **Sarah Sypniewski** co-founded Bark Pet Photography (www.barkpetphotography.com), a Los Angeles-based pet photography business, with a mission of giving back to local animal rescue organizations. In two short years, Bark Pet Photography emerged as an industry leader and was named Los Angeles's best pet photography business of 2011 by the CityVoter Los Angeles *HotList*.

Kim, the photographer behind Bark, graduated from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, with a bachelor of arts degree in studio arts. Kim's images are described as modern, bold, and graphic — a style influenced by her years of working as a graphic designer. Her work has been seen in places like the *Wall Street Journal*, PeoplePets.com, LAist.com, TMZ, *People StyleWatch Magazine*, and *Popular Dogs Series* magazines. When she's not photographing her clients' dogs, she's pursuing her first true love: helping to save animals in need with her pro-“bone”-o work. Whether taking professional photos of shelter dogs, flying with them across the country to their forever home, or adopting them herself, Kim tries to help animals in need however she can.

Sarah, the marketing force behind Bark, left her ten-year career in the nonprofit world to pursue writing, consulting, and Bark on a full-time basis. When she's not waxing poetic in the Bark newsletter or churning out website copy for her various consulting clients, she's rescuing animals on a volunteer basis and using the specialized strategy she developed for NinjaDog Concepts (www.ninjadogconcepts.com) to recover lost pets. She writes about all her adventures on her blog, *Sarah Leaps* (www.sarahsypniewski.wordpress.com). Her poem, “Paws Amidst Pain” — about the therapy dogs she worked with after the 9/11 tragedy — has become a tribute used by service animal organizations everywhere. Sarah holds a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from DePaul University, which she calls upon frequently when performing such tasks as writing heartstring-pulling adoption bios for her homeless animal friends, calming dogs and humans alike during photo shoots, and using “I” statements.

Dedication

From Kim: For my parents, who taught me what it means to love and care for a dog as part of the family.

For MeMe, who took in a feral cat despite being a “dog person” her whole life and who taught her grandkids that dogs and cats *can* coexist.

For my current four-legged friends (Kali, Piko, Sammy, and Delilah), who have reminded me throughout this process to pause and take a break every now and then.

And for all the animals I grew up with but never had the chance to photograph as I would today — Teddy, Boz, Norman, Bubba, Kitty, and Duncan.

From Sarah: The hours I spent on this book are dedicated with my deepest adoration and gratitude to all the dogs in my life — especially Sophie, Kali, Piko, Sammy, and Delilah. It is to them that I co-wrote this 320-page love letter.

From both: A *huge* wet kiss and tail wag go to all the animal rescuers out there who devote their lives to making a difference, one animal at a time. You spend countless hours and sleepless nights being the voice for the voiceless, and you inspire us to keep going. This book really is for you. May it help you find many homes for many deserving dogs.

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We want to give a big, juicy bone to all our furry clients who lent their cute mugs to these pages and to all the human pals who helped us pick images, promote the book, and just generally supported us every step of the way.

I (Sarah) also want to thank my family — most of all, Mom and Dad — not only for loving dogs as celebrated members of the brood but also for not freaking out (at least externally) when I told you I was ditching my career and paycheck to chase my dreams of becoming a writer. It's because of you that this book was even possible. A special thanks to Katie, who always was one of my biggest fans. I hope you can see this from where you sit.

A tip o' the cap also to my muse, for knowing I was a writer before I did and for always giving me a reason to put down words.

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Part I: Heel! The Basics of Dog Photography</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1: The Big Picture of Dog Photography.....	9
Chapter 2: Dog Photography: It's Like No Other Animal!	19
Chapter 3: Mutts and Bolts: Photography Equipment.....	29
Chapter 4: Paws-ing for the Basics: Camera Settings and Techniques.....	47
<i>Part II: Fetch! Go Get That Perfect Photo.....</i>	<i>73</i>
Chapter 5: Photographing Indoors	75
Chapter 6: Photographing in the Great Outdoors	91
Chapter 7: Taking Studio-Style Portraits	109
Chapter 8: Capturing Flawless Action	123
Chapter 9: Zooming in on Close-Ups and Details.....	139
Chapter 10: Capturing the Love: Dogs and Their People	153
<i>Part III: Sit! What to Do after the Photo Shoot</i>	<i>171</i>
Chapter 11: Introduction to Postprocessing.....	173
Chapter 12: Editing and Saving Your Final Shots.....	189
Chapter 13: Showing Off Your Photos	219
Chapter 14: Make No Bones about It: The Business of Dog Photography.....	229
<i>Part IV: The Part of Tens</i>	<i>253</i>
Chapter 15: Ten Ways to Make Your Photo Sessions Fun.....	255
Chapter 16: Doggone It! Conquering Ten Common Challenges	261
Chapter 17: Pro-Bone-O: More than Ten Tips for Giving Back.....	273
Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Promote Your New Business Endeavor	281
<i>Index</i>	<i>287</i>

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book.....	2
What You're Not to Read.....	3
Foolish Assumptions.....	3
How This Book Is Organized	4
Part I: Heel! The Basics of Dog Photography.....	4
Part II: Fetch! Go Get That Perfect Photo.....	4
Part III: Sit! What to Do after the Photo Shoot.....	4
Part IV: The Part of Tens.....	5
Icons Used in This Book	5
Where to Go from Here.....	5

Part I: Heel! The Basics of Dog Photography 7

Chapter 1: The Big Picture of Dog Photography 9

The Scope of Dog Photography	9
Capturing moments and stories that are fleeting.....	10
Understanding how dogs are like children to their humans.....	10
Keeping your canine subject at ease.....	12
Using dog photography in rescue work.....	12
Skills You Need to Excel	13
Picking the Perfect Approach	14
Capturing candid moments	15
Planning candid-looking images.....	16
Posing for perfection	18

Chapter 2: Dog Photography: It's Like No Other Animal! 19

Remembering That Fido Isn't Human	19
Dog Psychology 101: Figuring out the canine mind-set	20
Understanding how dogs communicate	21
Working with Your Best Friend	23
Boning up on your four-legged subject.....	23
Controlling the dog.....	27
Keeping Fido safe.....	28



Chapter 3: Mutts and Bolts: Photography Equipment29

Where It All Begins: Your Camera	29
Digital versus film	30
Compact digital camera (CDC) versus digital SLR	30
Factoring in your camera's sensor size (crop factor).....	32
Choosing the right memory card.....	34
Looking at Lenses	35
Getting up to speed on lenses	35
Zooming in on lens types	36
Choosing the Best In-Camera File Format	37
When to choose JPEG.....	37
When to choose RAW	39
For the Love of Lighting.....	39
A bright idea: Using natural light	40
Taking control: Using artificial light	41
Other Helpful Things to Have on Hand.....	44
For the dog.....	44
For the photog.....	45

Chapter 4: Paws-ing for the Basics: Camera Settings and Techniques47

Explaining Photography Fundamentals.....	48
Investigating ISO	48
Appreciating aperture	50
Soaking up shutter speed	51
Working with Your Camera Settings	51
Focusing on autofocus	52
Experimenting with depth of field in aperture-priority mode.....	54
Sifting through shutter speed in shutter-priority mode	55
Exposing exposure.....	55
Distinguishing between drive modes	57
Exploring Common Techniques	57
Practicing selective focusing.....	57
Panning for motion blur	58
Maximizing Your Compact Digital Camera.....	60
Developing an Artistic Eye: Composition	61
Following the rule of thirds	62
Eyeing your background and perspective.....	62
Framing the subject.....	63
Choosing what to leave in and what to leave out.....	64
Establishing balance.....	65
Creating Images in Color versus Black and White	66
Using color strategically	66
Setting a mood with black and white	67
You Don't Have to Be a Pro to Shoot Like One!	67
Before the photo shoot.....	68
During the photo shoot.....	69

***Part II: Fetch! Go Get That Perfect Photo* 73**

Chapter 5: Photographing Indoors75

Allowing Light to Determine When You Shoot	76
Photographing Your Dog in His Favorite Places	78
Special Considerations for Indoor Photos: It's All about the Light.....	78
Making the most of natural light.....	78
Using your built-in flash	79
Dialing in your external flash power	81
Dear Diary: Recording Day-to-Day Activities and Hangouts	82
Fido's lair (Or, let sleeping dogs lie)	82
Favorite furniture.....	84
Floors, doors, and common areas	86
The workplace.....	87

Chapter 6: Photographing in the Great Outdoors91

Keeping Time on Your Side.....	92
Scouting Your Location	92
Special Considerations for Outdoor Photos	93
Picking the perfect time of day	93
Figuring out fill flash.....	94
Working with weather and seasons.....	95
Adjusting for extra-bright locations	97
Trying Your Hand at Typical Locations.....	98
Backyard/front yard	99
The park.....	100
The city	101
Testing Your Skills with Challenging Locations	101
At the beach, lake, or river	102
In the pool.....	103
In the snow	105
In the car	107

Chapter 7: Taking Studio-Style Portraits109

Make Your Own Studio — Anytime, Anyplace.....	110
Special Considerations for Studio-Style Portraits	110
Creating a clean background.....	110
Choosing lights that don't break the bank	112
Positioning your lights just right	113
Sitting Pretty for Posed Portraits	116
Headshots	117
Full body portraits.....	117
Artistic details	118
Prepping for Photojournalistic Photos	119
Playing.....	119
Begging.....	120
Interacting.....	121

Chapter 8: Capturing Flawless Action 123

Getting the Timing Right for Interesting Action Shots.....	124
Finding a Place That's Light-Filled and Fun.....	125
Special Considerations for Action Photos.....	126
Setting your shutter-priority mode	126
Keeping memory card rate speed in mind	128
Snapping Specific Action Photos	128
Stretching.....	128
Chewing.....	130
Running/fetching.....	132
Swimming.....	135
Playing with toys.....	136

Chapter 9: Zooming in on Close-Ups and Details. 139

Working Out the When and Where Factors	140
Special Considerations for Close-Ups and Details	140
Moving in close versus zooming from afar.....	141
Getting creative with your cropping and angle of view.....	142
Documenting Doggie Features	142
Paws.....	142
Tail	143
Nose.....	145
Eyes & eyebrows	146
Ears	147
Mouth, teeth, & tongue	148
Quirks	148
Embellishing the Story with Pooch Paraphernalia.....	149
ID tag and collar	149
Bowls	150
Bed.....	151
Special toys.....	152

Chapter 10: Capturing the Love: Dogs and Their People. 153

Recording Special Moments between a Pooch and His People.....	154
Special Considerations for Group Shots.....	154
Getting crisp detail with depth of field	155
Giving clear directions to your furless models	156
Positioning Everyone for Posed Photos	157
Family portrait.....	157
Paw in hand	159
Face to face.....	160
Dog in lap	161
Gearing Up for Interactive Photos	163
Taking a walk.....	163
Playing.....	165
Doggie kisses	166

Unique Pairings	167
Awww! Dogs and babies	167
So sweet: Dogs and seniors	169

Part III: Sit! What to Do after the Photo Shoot 171

Chapter 11: Introduction to Postprocessing173

Tools of the Postprocessing Trade	173
Computer	174
Card reader	174
Photo-editing software	175
Managing Your Masterpieces.....	176
Downloading your photos to your computer	177
Developing a folder structure that actually works.....	178
Backing up your photos . . . and backing up your backups!.....	179
Managing Files within Lightroom	181
Importing photos to Lightroom	181
Exporting photos from Lightroom.....	183
Setting up collections within Lightroom.....	185

Chapter 12: Editing and Saving Your Final Shots189

Digging Through Your Images: How to Choose the Keepers	190
Adjusting Photos in Adobe Lightroom	191
Cropping and straightening your photos	191
Correcting white balance	192
Perfecting tone	194
Using your histogram as a guide.....	195
Detailing presence	197
Retouching in Adobe Photoshop.....	199
Grooming away the “ickies”	201
Achieving sharpness	205
Clearing cloudy eyes in senior dogs.....	208
Removing background distractions and the occasional leash	211
Saving Your Masterpiece.....	215
Choosing the right resolution	215
Settling on a file format	216

Chapter 13: Showing Off Your Photos219

Posting Pics of Your Pooch Online.....	219
Taking advantage of social media galleries.....	220
Using online photo-sharing websites	221
Uploading to a website directly from your workflow application	221
Show and Tell: Printing Your Photos	225
Sticking with tradition	225
Working with a modern touch	226

Chapter 14: Make No Bones about It: The Business of Dog Photography 229

Figuring Out How Much You Really Love Photographing Dogs	229
Touching on Business Basics.....	231
Doing your due diligence	231
Creating a business plan and setting goals	231
Branding your business	233
Completing the nitty-gritty legal stuff	233
Setting your prices.....	234
Operating with originality, integrity, and collegiality	235
Taking Care of Business before the Photo Shoot	236
Identifying your subject	236
Discovering your client's needs, expectations, and reasons for the photo shoot.....	237
Guiding your client toward the right session/package option	237
Scheduling the session and confirming details.....	238
Preparing your human and canine clients.....	238
Managing your model releases	239
Taking Care of Business after the Photo Shoot	240
Delivering client proofs.....	240
Client viewing	242
Accepting payment.....	242
Building Your Portfolio	243
Choosing images to show the world	243
Compiling your first portfolio	244
Keeping your portfolio current	244
Maintaining a Marketing Mind-Set.....	244
Free marketing methods	245
Paid marketing materials	250

Part IV: The Part of Tens..... 253

Chapter 15: Ten Ways to Make Your Photo Sessions Fun 255

Introducing Yourself to the Dog	255
Filling Your Pockets with Enticing Treats	256
Getting Physical: The Preshoot Workout	257
Incorporating Play.....	258
Taking Lots of Breaks.....	258
Staying Home	258
Styling Your Dog	258
Keeping Your Cool.....	259
Using Small Talk.....	260
Keeping Safety in Mind All the Time	260

Chapter 16: Doggone It! Conquering Ten Common Challenges 261

Avoiding the Black Dog Blob.....	261
Making Adjustments for White Dogs.....	263
Coping with Uncooperative Dogs.....	264
Capturing Puppies' Cuteness.....	265
Staying Sensitive to Senior Dogs' Needs.....	266
Planning for Leashes.....	267
Working with Multiple Dogs.....	269
Managing a Menagerie.....	270
Sizing Up the Challenge of Giant Breeds.....	271
Handling Stressed-Out Humans.....	272

Chapter 17: Pro-Bone-O: More than Ten Tips for Giving Back 273

Identifying Local Shelters and Rescues.....	273
Making the Best of the Shelter Setting.....	274
Offering Your Help without Creating Extra Work for the Rescue.....	275
Making the Most of Adoption Day Shoots.....	276
Being Aware of Rescue Animals' Special Needs.....	277
Spreading the Word about Adoptable Animals through Social Media.....	277
Donating a Portion of Your Session Fees as a Fundraiser.....	278
Donating Packages for Silent Auctions.....	279
Hosting Special Events as a Fundraiser.....	279
Using Your Own Website to Help Rescues.....	279
Using Adoptable Animals in Your Promo Materials.....	280

Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Promote Your New Business Endeavor 281

Creating a Website.....	281
Getting Found by Search Engines.....	282
Talking Up Your Business.....	283
Building Relationships with Local Pet Care Businesses.....	284
Trading Services Wisely.....	284
Volunteering with Local Rescue Groups.....	285
Attending Pet-Related Events.....	285
Visiting the Dog Park.....	285
Building Press Instead of Advertising.....	285
Staying Connected with Past Clients.....	286

***Index*..... 287**

Introduction



They're just like humans — no two are the same. Some constantly wag their tails, happy just to be alive in their blissful oblivion. Others are curmudgeonly and reserved; they prefer to chew a bone in peaceful solitude, not caring to be bothered with playtime. And then there are those who hear the jangle of their leash and come scrambling across the house, excited to go on a new adventure to parts (and smells) unknown.

Dogs.

They're complex and simple, funny and serious, hyperactive and sloth-like. But among them all, one common thread runs strong and true: We love them. Whether because of or in spite of these quirks, we love the specific things that make our dog *ours*.

This book is actually a tribute to them. It's an ode to those who curl up at our feet, plop themselves onto our laps, lick our tears away, crack us up with their four-legged antics, get us out of the house for walks, teach us new tricks, and school us on what it means to truly care for someone.

Dog Photography For Dummies is a celebration of these beautiful creatures that take up residence in our hearts and share a lifetime of moments with us. Though we can't make them live forever, with a few photography skills and lots of patience, we *can* capture the belly rubs, dirty paws, and sloppy kisses forever, before they fade away all too soon.

About This Book

Although they come with their own challenges, dogs make very obvious and interesting photography subjects, and a lot of books are devoted to this topic. But where other dog photography books stop at giving you composition ideas or pages of the author's own photos as examples to replicate without really telling you *how* to take them, we start at the beginning and end with a final photo suitable for framing and hanging in a place of honor in your home.

Just like our subject, *Dog Photography For Dummies* does a lot of sniffing and digging. If you're a beginner, you'll find some basic information about equipment and how to use it so you're ready when your dog does something cute. If you already have some photography experience, you'll still benefit from chapters that describe different types of dog-specific shots in a fun, step-by-step way to ensure that you capture the moment. And if you already know

that dog photography's your thing and you want to break into the business, we have a full how-to on that, too.

We start with a general photography refresher for anyone who needs it, and then we point out how to take every doggie photograph you want (and even some you don't yet know you want). We continue on with what to do after you take your photos to get them to look all polished and pretty, and then we tell you what to do if you want to join the ranks of the professionals.

The great thing about *Dog Photography For Dummies* is that we, your humble authors, are just like you — dog lovers and photography enthusiasts. And we remember a time when we weren't professionals. With this book, we hope to offer you an entertaining, easy-to-follow adventure through the ever-expanding world of dog photography. We're glad you're here and hope you enjoy choosing your own path through these pages.

Conventions Used in This Book

We use the following conventions throughout the text to make things consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ New terms appear in *italic* and are closely followed by an easy-to-understand definition.
- ✓ We use **bold** text to highlight keywords in bulleted lists and the action parts of numbered steps.
- ✓ All web addresses appear in `monofont`.
- ✓ Each photo in this book is followed by information in small print that looks something like this: *50mm, 1/500 sec., f/2.8, 100*. These are the camera settings used to take the photo. The first number is the focal length, the second is the shutter speed, the third is the aperture, and the fourth is the ISO. (Don't worry if you don't know what any of that means; we explain each of those settings in Chapter 4.)

Oh, and one more photography thing regarding those digital cameras that you can slip in your pocket or purse — we don't call them *point-and-shoot cameras* here; we call them *compact digital cameras* (CDCs), which is in line with the current industry standard.

As for how we talk about dogs in this book, we always refer to them as “he,” “she,” or by a proper name (thanks to our clients and fans for letting us “borrow” those names). Also, we don't use the term *owner*, but rather, we refer to a person as a dog's *human* or *guardian*.

What You're Not to Read

No matter how much you love dogs, photography, and reading, we realize that parts of this book matter less to some of you than they do to others. Even though we poured our *hearts and souls* into writing this just for *you*, we understand that you may not want to read every word. Really. We get that you may have better things to do than dive into every page. No, no — it's okay. We're fine. Those aren't tears running down our faces; that's just, er, water.

Seriously, though, we get that you have dogs to photograph, so if you need to skip over some parts so you can pull your nose out of this book, we support that. Here's what you can gloss over:

- ✓ **Text in sidebars:** *Sidebars* are shaded boxes that usually give detailed examples or provide some information about an advanced technique on the topic at hand.
- ✓ **The stuff about us at the front of the book:** This book isn't about us. It's about *you*. And your dog.

Foolish Assumptions

Yeah, yeah, we know what they say about assuming. Nonetheless, keeping this book under a thousand pages is good for all of us, so we had to narrow our audience just a tad. Here's what we went with:

- ✓ You love dogs and have at least basic experience with them.
- ✓ You aren't afraid of handling cameras and photography equipment.
- ✓ Your knowledge of dog photography is anywhere from zilch to advanced.
- ✓ You *may* want to open your own dog photography business.
- ✓ You're up for getting down on the floor, getting dirty, and occasionally getting slobbered on.
- ✓ You may not be a pro, but you want to take photographs like one.
- ✓ You have a computer and are willing to use it for the sake of your photos.

Though we debated about what kind of camera you, our readers, are using, in the end, we decided to gear this book toward digital SLR users. If you use a compact digital camera, never fear. We haven't left you out, fair friends. Most

of the guidelines in this book apply to you, and where they don't (or when we offer additional information specific to compact digital camera users), we note that with a special "Quick Click" icon (see the later section about icons for more details).

How This Book Is Organized

To aid your mission of carving your own path through this book, we divide it up into nice, manageable pieces for you to navigate. We start with parts, which are broad areas of interest. We break the parts down into chapters. Use the table of contents as your map and the index as your compass, and enjoy the journey.

Part I: Heel! The Basics of Dog Photography

This is the place where we go over all the foundational information you need. We cover how to use both digital SLRs and compact digital cameras (and if you don't have a camera yet, we even outline what to look for in a new one) and what to keep on hand when you photograph dogs. We even throw in a couple of psychology lessons (both canine and human). Start with this part if you want to catch up (or brush up) on your fundamentals.

Part II: Fetch! Go Get That Perfect Photo

This is where the rubber meets the road — er, the camera meets the canine. We give you lots of example photos and tell you *exactly* how you can achieve similar results. We go through indoor and outdoor shots, posed shots, action shots, and even detail and group shots. If you already know your way around cameras and dogs and you're ready to start photographing, this is the part for you.

Part III: Sit! What to Do after the Photo Shoot

In this part, we go over everything you need to do to take your photos through their final stages. We usher you through downloading the files off of your camera and onto your computer, editing them, and even uploading them onto your website and other media. We also devote a whole chapter to making a business out of dog photography.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

This part covers a range of helpful topics distilled into informative lists. Here, we dish it all — making photo shoots fun, overcoming common challenges, giving back to the animal rescue world, and drumming up business.

Icons Used in This Book



To make this book easier to read and simpler to use, we include some icons that can help you find and fathom key ideas and information.

This icon is meant to draw your attention to a little something extra we think you'll find helpful.



This icon points out something that you may already know or that we've stated before, but it's important enough to reiterate by setting it apart from everything else.



This icon signals that the information listed here can save you from potential disaster, whether that's harm to your dog, damage to your equipment, or injury to yourself.



This icon marks information that is specific to compact digital camera users, so if you use one, pay close attention!

Where to Go from Here

This book is designed so you can start anywhere, end anywhere, and go anywhere! Need a little direction? If you want a nice photo for your holiday cards this year, head over to Chapter 7. If you want a family portrait, jump to Chapter 10. If you want to know how to set up a dog photography business, your destination is Chapter 14.

If you still don't really know, just start at the very beginning (it's a very good place to start). Part I gives you a full introduction to dog photography and can give you an idea of where to head to next.

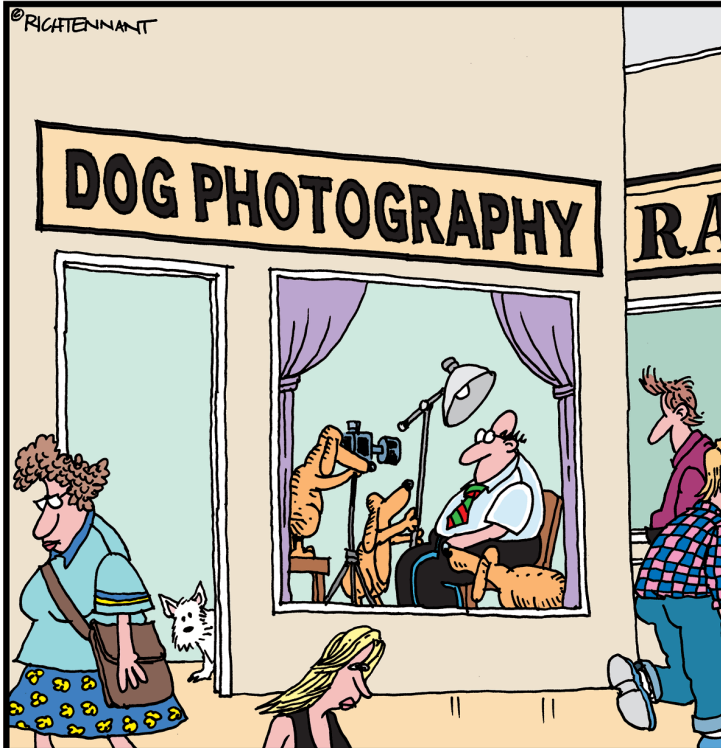
Part I

Heel!

The Basics of Dog Photography

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

You have a lot to get in order before you start photographing your favorite pooch, and in this part, we cover it all. We detail the tools and skills you need to master so you and Fido can make it all look effortless. The chapters in this part comprise a framework that's both sturdy and welcoming, whether you're a novice or an advanced photographer. We take you through all the prerequisites you need — be they camera or canine competencies — to succeed in this fun, furry adventure.



The Big Picture of Dog Photography

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the goals and challenges of dog photography
 - ▶ Using your skills to excel at dog photography
 - ▶ Seeing how different approaches yield different results
-

People are showing a growing interest in pet photography of all kinds, especially dog photography (exhibit A: you're reading this book). At the hobbyist as well as professional level, dog photographers are popping up all over. This interest makes perfect sense — we share our lives with our wonderful dogs, but the time we spend together is simply much too short. Those of us who love dogs seem to be on a quest to immortalize our canine friends, to somehow hang on to these moments we share together forever. That's where dog photography comes in.

In this chapter, we reveal how snapping pictures of your (or someone else's) dog can change your life, and perhaps even the dog's life. But before you grab your camera, you should know something about the skills that can make you successful, so we also cover those. And just as your dog has his favorite tricks, you'll come to have your favorite ways to take photos of your pup. We outline your options at the end of the chapter.



The Scope of Dog Photography

People have different motivations for wanting great photos of their dogs, so your first task is to figure out what that motivation is so you can take the right photo, whether for yourself or someone else. Do you want to capture images of Hercules playing his favorite game? Maybe you want just one nice

photo of Hogan you can use for your holiday cards this year. Or perhaps Quimby's starting to slow down a little and you want to make sure you have photos of him as you two go about your shared daily routine that you'll one day miss.

Whatever the motivation is, the goal of dog photography is pretty basic: catch those real moments of a beloved dog's life. The scope of what it takes to achieve that goal is, admittedly, a hearty challenge. You have to understand how dogs think and behave, be willing to get down and dirty with them, be just as clever with the dog's humans, and employ every drop of patience, flexibility, and tranquility you have. Just like Jesse's obedience lessons, dog photography takes hard work and practice, but in the end, there's nothing but tail wags all around.

Capturing moments and stories that are fleeting

The true goal of dog photography (as with any other photography) is to freeze time — to capture those precious moments in a dog's life for all eternity. When you reflect upon your dog and the relationship you share with her, what stands out? What do you always want to remember about her? When you want to show the “real” Millie in photographs, forgo the commands. Much of dog photography is just about being quick with a shutter button. In Figure 1-1, we caught an unplanned moment in which Henry decided it was time to play tug with his leash, perfectly capturing this little joker's personality.

One of the unique aspects about photographing dogs is that you can't really tell them exactly how to pose, and while that *can* be an obstacle, you also end up capturing some seriously genuine moments. Dogs can't really fake it; what you see is what you get. Sure, you can tell Jackie Brown to “sit,” but you can't instruct him to “back up 3 yards and then come running toward me with a happy grin on your face.” If you want that to happen, you have to follow Jackie around with a camera until he spontaneously does what you're looking for. Of course, there are a ton of tips, tricks, and strategies to encourage your fuzzy pal to do something cute or fun (and we tell you all about those in this book), but being quick on the draw results in your being able to freeze in time some very real-life moments.

Understanding how dogs are like children to their humans

Obviously, you know what your own dog means to you, so remember that feeling when you photograph other people's dogs. Always respect the humans' directions (as long as the dog isn't in danger) and defer to them. You wouldn't tell others how to parent their human children, nor should you do so with canine kids.



50mm, 1/160 sec., f/11, 125

Figure 1-1: Keep an eye out for unplanned moments like this.



The heart of the matter really is a matter of the heart. People love their dogs, just like you love yours. And that's probably why they're letting you take photos of them in the first place. Most times, you fall just as in love with them as their humans have, but sometimes, a dog may try your every last nerve. Just remember: That dog is someone's child. No matter how Max tests you, don't get angry and don't give up. Take a break if you must, but always strive to see Max through loving eyes, just as if he were your own dog (or child). And create images that truly bring out the parent-child bond that many humans share with their dogs.

Keeping your canine subject at ease

Dogs are energy experts. They can read it, they can give it off, and they can detect the most subtle changes in it. Energy is one of their main languages, which means that if you're stressed, dogs sense it. If you're calm, they know it. More than that, they mirror your energy.



When you're photographing dogs, get yourself into a peaceful state of mind and stay there until you're done. If you get all crazy and hyper (or even demanding and angry), you can expect the dog to do the same. Ever notice how those TV shows about improving pet behavior start with a clip of humans demonstrating a dog's horrible behavior as they yell at the dog in vain, but then the expert steps in, and suddenly, the dog is heeling, sitting, and ignoring the cat? It's not magic; it's energy. And to be successful with your dog photography, yours has to be good.

Different dogs respond differently, of course, so it's up to you to meet the dog where the dog is. In other words, a big Lab mix may not mind you bending down to give him a big greeting and a solid pat on the back, whereas a small Chihuahua probably doesn't feel comfortable with someone hovering over her. Your canine subjects need a lot of space, especially at the beginning. Remember that being the star of a photo shoot is probably a brand-new experience for them, so to keep them comfortable and calm while photographing, give them plenty of mental and physical space.

More important, keep the process *fun*! The more you can turn it into a game, the better your results will be.

Using dog photography in rescue work

Shelters and rescues across the United States (and throughout the world) house millions of homeless dogs just waiting to be adopted. Now more than ever, a good photo of a shelter dog has the power to literally save his life. Websites, social media, smart phones, and e-mail all contribute to the ability to send photos out over state and country lines and even overseas. When people hit the Internet to find their next canine companion, a compelling photo catches their eye and causes them to click a link to find out more.

Overworked shelter employees often don't have the time or equipment to take good photos of each of the hundreds of dogs in their shelter. Often, the only chance a dog has rests on a grainy snapshot taken while the dog was at his most fearful or injured. The animals waiting for adoption can benefit greatly from your skills as a dog photographer. Your high quality equipment, photography skills, and kind rapport with dogs can save lives when you produce photos that get dogs noticed.

In Figure 1-2, you can see the before and after photos of Sugar, a pit bull who had been abused and then dumped at the shelter. The photo on the top was taken on a cellphone the day she was found, and the photo on the bottom was professionally done. Using the cellphone photos didn't yield much interest in Sugar; the photos were small and grainy and simply emphasized her scar. The professional photos showed Sugar in a new light, garnering her much attention and support from countless individuals, as well as Molly's Mutts & Meows, an amazing rescue group that took Sugar under its wing and stood by her through thick and thin.

There's no better feeling than when someone who's just adopted a rescue dog says, "Oh, I saw the photo you took of him and just *knew* he was mine."

Skills You Need to Excel

Just like any new activity, dog photography takes practice. As long as you're willing to spend the time learning techniques and trying them out, you can excel. Of course, having a few of these skills helps you produce even better photos:

- ✓ **Creativity:** Photography is an art, but dog photography is art with four legs and lots of slobber. Not only do you have to get creative with perspective, style, composition, color, and all that stuff you learn about in art school, you also get to work with subjects that don't really understand English, which makes things *really* interesting. From how you get a dog's attention (see Chapter 2) to how



50 mm, 1/500 sec., f/2.8, 125

Figure 1-2: One good photo of an adoptable dog can make a huge difference in how they're perceived.

to coax a shy dog to pose (check out Chapter 7) to how you do your final edits (flip to Chapter 12), dog photography really requires out-of-the-box thinking!

- ✓ **Dog handling skills/basic understanding of dog psychology:** There's lots to know about how dogs think and how to best work with them. If you want to photograph them, you have to understand them and be willing to communicate with them in their language. You need to be comfortable with how dogs interact with one another and with people, and you need to be able to direct them to some degree — at least enough to keep them safe and happy during your session. (We give you the skinny on dog psychology in Chapter 2.) Of course, the better you are at understanding and interacting with your canine friends, the better your photos will most likely be.
- ✓ **Proficiency with cameras, lenses, and more:** Obviously, you need a lot of technical knowledge and skills to be good at dog photography. You need to understand how the different parts of a camera work together to create the photograph you want. This is especially important with dog photography because the subjects move so fast. If Luca suddenly starts doing something really cute but you're occupied with fiddling around with your settings, chances are you'll miss the shot. Knowing where to set your aperture, what lens to use, and how much light you need for any given shot should be second nature. Practice until it is! (Chapter 3 covers photography equipment, and Chapter 4 provides basic information about camera settings and photography techniques.)
- ✓ **Business acumen:** If you want to make a business out of dog photography, a love of dogs is a good starting point, but you need much more than that. You have to be a good researcher, manager, marketer, salesperson, planner, accountant, and about a dozen other things. If you truly want to succeed, you have to work hard to develop all these areas. (If this sounds like the perfect career for you, check out Chapter 14.)

Picking the Perfect Approach

Photography is all about options. You can choose how much light to use, where to shoot, what to do, and which colors to use. All these choices contribute to the overall look and style of your photo. One of the biggest choices to make when it comes to dog photography is your approach. You can aim for truly candid moments, candid-looking (but planned) shots, or totally posed portraits. Each approach is different and yields different (but equally delightful) results. As we discuss different settings and ideas throughout this book, keep in mind these different approaches and choose which one works best for you.