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Program Watch

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Dog and Pony Programs

At a time of great economic upheaval, with consumer confidence in October falling to a record low, one wonders whether horses will still be able to get their regular massages or dogs will have to forego their personal-training sessions.

People outside of California may not be aware that programs exist to keep man's and woman's best friends in shape. In Carmel Valley, outside of Monterey, the Los Laureles Equine Rehabilitation Center helps horses recover from leg injuries, arthritis or other debilitating conditions through a regimen of exercise, massage therapy, heat treatments and conditioning. The center's equine exercise equipment includes a Ferno AquaPacer, an underwater treadmill for horses, and a EuroWalker Equi-Gym, which is an updated version of the pony wheel, in which a team of ponies walks in a circle. A

month's stay at the center — horses are typically referred by veterinarians — averages \$1,500, depending on the treatment regimen.

In Los Angeles, meanwhile, a new outdoor program has emerged that promises to lead "dogs and their people" to wellness: Thank Dog! Bootcamp (www.thankdogbootcamp.com), which was launched in June by a fitness trainer and two dog-obedience trainers. Participants — er, the dogs — are required to wear a training collar and leash, and come to L.A.'s Pan Pacific Park with water and a dog mat. Bipedes must bring their own set of hand weights, a towel and a bottle of water in addition to their dog. (The group's Borrow a Dog program, which comes with a discounted enrollment price, offers loaners.) The hour-and-a-half-long classes start with a half-hour dog-obedience session, which is not mandatory. But an in-home one-hour obedience class is required prior to the beginning of each six-week program, to prepare dogs and their owners for the rules and rigors of the workout. Running shoes are suggested for humans, especially since, in typical boot-camp fashion, owners whose dogs aren't obedient might find themselves and their dogs being given a more punishing workout as a result.

Beyond the initial \$50 consultation, the five-days-per-week program costs \$550 for new "cadets" and \$500 for returnees. A three-days-per-week maintenance program costs \$395. Jamie Bowers, Thank Dog!'s vice president and co-founder, concedes that the economy tanking hasn't exactly helped the program's rollout, but that classes have attracted a fervent core group. "Participation has kind of leveled off," she says. "But we're hanging in there."



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