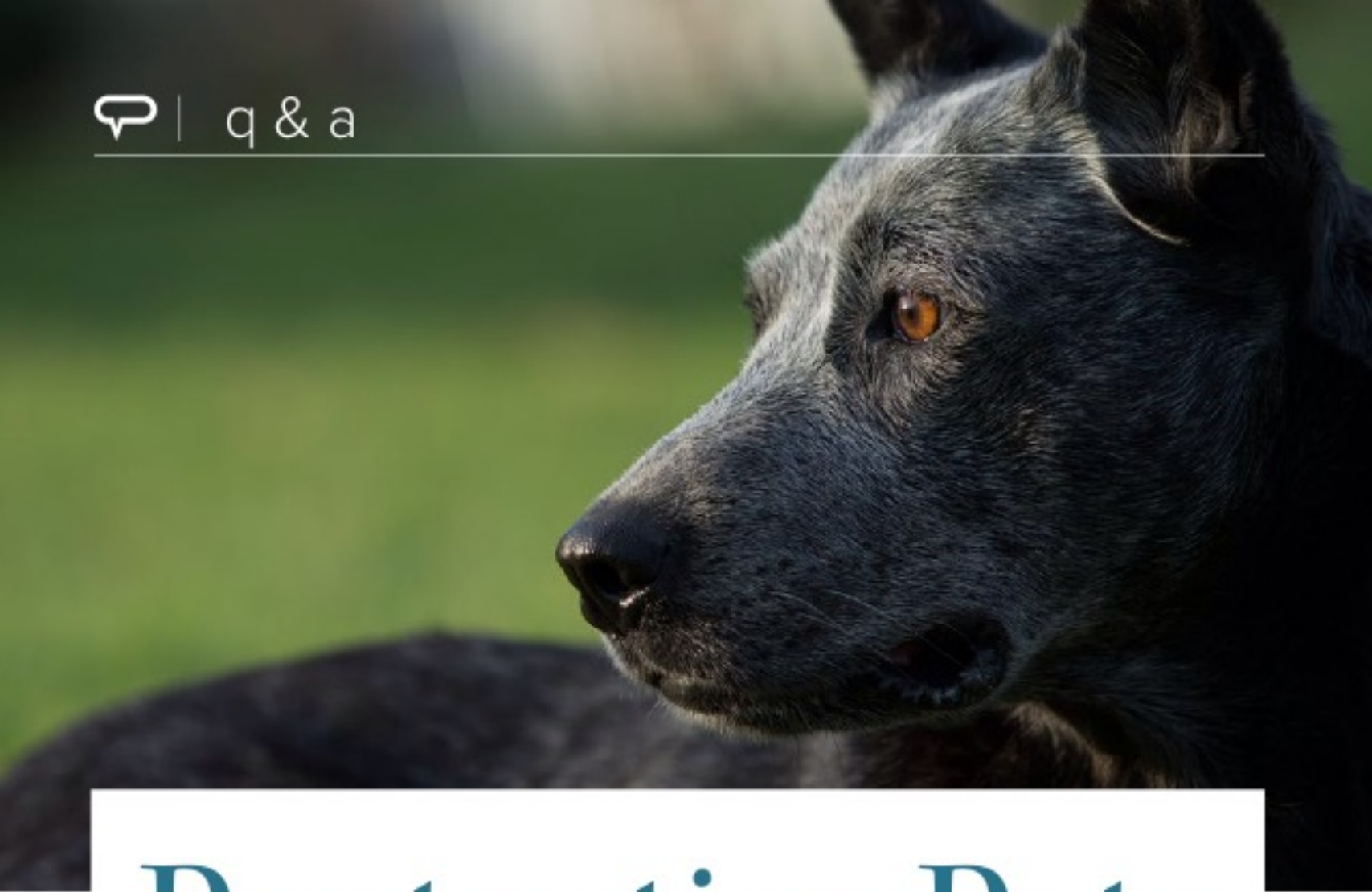

Protective Pets

TRAIN A DOG TO GUARD YOUR PROPERTY

by **AMANDA BELL**

Most dogs have natural instincts to be protective and loyal toward the humans that care for them, hence the nickname "man's best friend." But if you want your dog to learn the skills to provide assistance in dangerous situations, an expert well-versed in personal protection training can help. Owning a guard dog shouldn't replace a good alarm system, but having a pet with protection training can help scare off intruders and give you added peace of mind. **Mark "Dogman" Castillero, owner of Pro-Train Innovative Dog Training in Vista, Calif.**, answers some common questions about personal protection training below.

Q: Explain the difference between guard dog and personal protection dog training.

Castillero: Area guard dog training involves preparing a dog to keep watch over a specific area. It's used more for commercial purposes, not for households, because of the liability issues. Dogs with this type of training will attack anyone considered a stranger.

Personal protection training involves teaching a dog how to attack or bark on command, but stop when told. It teaches the dog to become a sociable bodyguard and still be a pet that can go anywhere with you.

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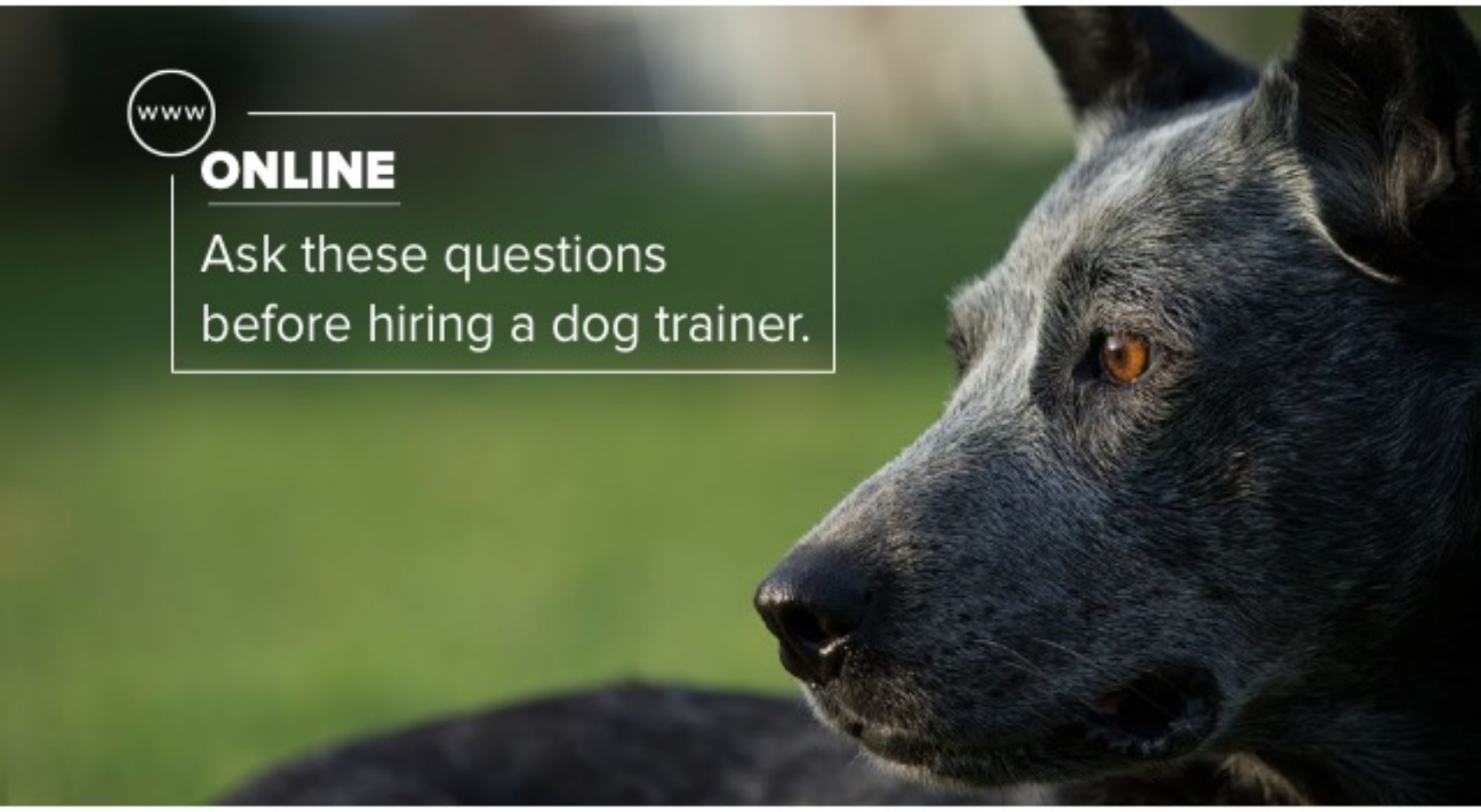
Q: What breeds and personality traits make a dog a good candidate for personal protection training?



Castillero: Outgoing, confident, happy-go-lucky dogs that like to play tug of war and chase fare best. Nervous, hesitant dogs that are reluctant around strangers might not be the best candidates for personal protection training. Breeds that do well include Rottweiler, pit bull, Doberman, Belgian Malinois, German shepherd, boxer, bullmastiff, bulldog, Fila Brasileiro, beauceron, Airedale terrier and bouvier des Flandres.

Q: What does the training process involve?

Castillero: Exercises involve obedience training, playing tug of war, biting on a sleeve and eventually going after someone without padded equipment — all with the guidance and supervision of a trainer. For a dog to learn when and at what intensity to display aggression, how to do it well and be prepared to do it can take up to a year depending on the dog's temperament, age and receptiveness to training. For the most effective results, I recommend starting when the dog is 4-5 months old, just like with any obedience training.

Q: What qualifications should you look for when hiring a trainer?

Castillero: Look for someone with a background in personal protection who can offer continued assistance and support even after your dog completes the initial training. If you can't find a trainer in your area, many sporting dog clubs also offer resources. While French ring and schutzhund — German for "protection dog" — clubs focus more on sport, they also involve aspects of training for obedience, tracking and protection work. No state or government certifications exist for the handler or dog stating that they've received the training, but many training facilities and clubs offer their own forms of recognition.

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Q: What liability issues exist for owning a dog with this type of training?

Castillero: Before embarking down this path I recommend looking into the liability risk you may incur, which varies by state. You might not have coverage on your homeowners' insurance, or your premiums might be higher. If the dog mauls someone who breaks into your house, you'll likely be held liable for damages.

Bottom line: Giving your dog the proper training is vital for the safety of you and the dog. Lots of people fear personal protection training because they think it's going to make their dog a mean, nasty pet. I always say it's more like teaching an adult martial arts — they become a devastating fighter with no rage involved.

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