



**SOCIAL
MOVEMENT**

RUNNING WITH THE HOUNDS

Canicross-training company DogFit believes it's unlikely you will ever find a running buddy as enthusiastic as your dog

BARNS AND RECREATION
Canicross is a great way to get dogs fit while you run

→ **DOGFIT IS PUTTING ITS BEST PAW** forward by encouraging more people to run with their pooches

'I was not a runner at all before starting canicross – in fact, I hated running,' says Ginetta George, one of the cofounders of DogFit, a company that runs classes in canicross – running with dogs – and sells kit.

Her journey in the sport began because her dog,

Coco, a German pointer, wasn't doing very well at gun-dog training. 'She was terrible at it,' says George. 'So I decided I should find something else we could do together; I saw this sport online and I got interested.'

'Gail [Gail Walker, DogFit's other founder] was running a social group that I found on Facebook, so I contacted her and said, "Could you show me how I can do this?"

And from there we started running together.'

Canicross is growing in popularity and in the last 12 months there has been a spike in people attending classes and buying the equipment to practise it. Since the coronavirus outbreak and the rise of social distancing, George and Walker have been giving away their couch-to-5K plan for free for those who want to give it a go.

'Canicross is a very social sport as well,' says George. 'In normal times, we organise runs together with other canicrossers in our areas and most of the courses we teach are in

groups, so you get to meet lots of people. Giving away our starter plan is kind of our gift to the community in these difficult times.'

Of paramount importance to DogFit is the comfort and health of the dogs. 'The dogs are always a priority,' says George. 'We make sure that on runs and races there are lots of water stops for them. We also ensure dogs are trained gradually for the distances the owner wants to run, and that training happens in the right environment and weather.'

DogFit also offers workshops for runners or dog trainers who want to become certified canicross trainers. 'We now have 45 accredited trainers around the UK,' says George. 'They teach classes and run their own small canicross clubs.'

Michelle Mortimer, a certified DogFit trainer, started canicross with her youngest dog, Poppy, as she thought it would be a good way to exercise together. 'Poppy is a rescue dog from Romania and we think she is part podenco [a sight-hound bred to hunt rabbits] and is therefore highly prey-driven,' she says.

Mortimer thought canicross was just a way to exercise without Poppy running off chasing animals, but it became much more. 'Canicross has brought fun, fitness and friendship to my life. I honestly can't imagine living without it now, and as a canicross trainer I can take my dogs to work with me!'

And what do her dogs think? 'Oh, they absolutely love it!' says Mortimer.



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