

Safe Run

Gentle dobies take bites out of crime

Many women are afraid to run alone for fear of being assaulted. Some women only run with partners. Others angrily give up running. Now there's an alternative.

"I don't want to be raped," says Linda Whitaker, who often runs with a doberman pinscher. Her escort is more than an effective deterrent to assault — she says it gives her the freedom and confidence to go anywhere anytime. "With a doberman, I don't feel the least bit scared. I could go in the darkest alley."

Whitaker got her doberman from Project Safe Run, located at 1342 Alder St. apt. 1. Shelley Reeher coordinates the non-profit escort service that is available to all women

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— Angela Elden

24 hours-a-day. For a suggested donation of \$10 to \$25 a month, the service provides highly-trained dogs to women who don't want to be alone.

But the dogs do more than just jog.

"They're not just for runners. You can take them for a walk, to the beach or even camping," Reeher says.

And the reason for doberman pinschers is clear. "We chose dobies to capitalize on their bad press image. People think they're land sharks," she says.

But actually, they're quite friendly.

"The dogs are totally loving and friendly to the person



Although doberman pinschers traditionally are trained as guard dogs, they can be "totally loving and friendly" to their owners or wards, says University marketing junior Angela Elden, who runs with 'dobbies' as a safety measure.

running with them," says Angela Elden, a marketing junior who has run with the dogs for more than a year. "But, they're always alert and wary of strangers."

Elden agrees.

"Once a scruffy looking guy came up too close behind me. I didn't see him, but Jake growled at him. The man said 'whoa' and backed off."

It takes only fifteen minutes for a novice to learn how to handle the dogs, who are trained to obey only the commands of the runner they escort. When they are running, the dogs know they are "working" and are not easily distracted.

"Sam sometimes takes an interest in squirrels or birds, but he never pulls you around. I've even had dogs jump on him and Sam just looked and kept running," says Whitaker, a South Eugene High School cross country runner with two teammates who also use the service.

Patrons reported that before they ran with the dogs they were often the victims of cat calls and harassment from some men.

"Some jerks used to yell 'hey baby' or say something insulting when they saw me running alone. Now, when I run with a dobie they just say 'gee, it sure is a nice day' or 'that's a nice dog you have,'" Elden says.

The service has loaned the dogs 827 times since its beginning in October 1981 — without an attempted assault. Because of high demand for the dogs, the service has expanded from one dog in 1981 to five dogs today. Sorority women have used the service most, but Reeher would like to see all University women patronize it. "If more people want the dogs, we'll get more dogs," Reeher says.

Reeher will present Project Safe Run to interested students at 7 p.m. Oct. 25 in 150 Geology. This will be an opportunity to meet the dogs, ask questions and see simulated attacks. The presentation is sponsored by the Panhellenic Association. Contact Reeher at 345-8086 for more information.



As a deterrent to sexual assault and rape, many local women, like University junior Angela Elden and friend, take doberman pinschers loaned by Project Safe Run on their runs.



'One step closer and I'll clobber ya' is the message this trained doberman pinscher, 'escorting' runner Leslie Leatherman, gives to Scott Wilkinson, who simulates an attack against the University sophomore.



It only takes 15 minutes to learn how to handle the dog.

Story and photos by Jeffrey Burns