



Fern

Advanced training has started!

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Hello, it's Laura here,
Fern's trainer.

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I'm a Guide Dog Mobility Specialist (GDMS) and have been working for Guide Dogs for 19 years. The most rewarding parts of my job are getting to know each dog, bringing out the best in them, and matching them with their future partners. Over the years, I've worked with countless dogs, each one bringing their own strengths and challenges.

Creating a bond

Fern is a quick learner with a loving and bright personality, which makes her a true joy to work with. She always greets me with enthusiasm when her fosterers drop her off at training school. We usually start our mornings playing fetch; this helps her burn off some initial energy before she focuses on training. Fern has met the other dog I'm training, George, a golden retriever around her age. They are quite the contrast: she's a petite girl, while he's quite tall - despite the size difference, they get along wonderfully! They enjoy their downtime and free runs together, which is great for their socialisation skills and confidence.



Perfecting skills

At this stage, Fern has mastered all the skills from early training. She's excellent at finding button boxes and kerbs; she's also great at finding empty seats and indicating these with a chin rest. Now, I'm working on building her confidence and refining her ability to remain calm and focused while guiding. I'm teaching her to make decisions with less support coming from my side, which will be essential when guiding her future owner. Fern's very capable, however, she has a sensitive side so sometimes she needs a little bit more reassurance from me.

Fern and I are focusing on obstacle avoidance. I simulate real-life challenges by setting up obstacles, like dustbins, on pavements. I'm teaching her how to navigate these obstructions safely, and indicate to her handler if they need to step off the path to move around them. She is doing very well! I usually train Fern in the urban area around our training school. To expose her to even busier environments, I recently took her to Birmingham city centre where she experienced public transport and longer train journeys. She coped particularly well on the train, but she found the heavy traffic overwhelming; we'll bear this in mind when matching her.

Occasionally Fern gets distracted by scents, so I'm teaching her not to sniff around while guiding by rewarding her when she focuses on what we're doing. Her love for cuddles and food makes training her easier using positive reinforcement.

Finding the perfect match

As Fern gets closer to the end of her training, I'll be considering what kind of person will be the best match for her. Given her loving and enthusiastic personality, she would benefit from a potential owner who is affectionate and loves to give her loads of cuddles; it could be someone with a very active lifestyle, living in a residential or moderately busy area. Once I identify her potential owner, I'll fine-tune her training based on their specific needs and daily routes.

Thank you for sponsoring Fern

Although this is her final official Pupdate, we'll let you know how she gets on, and once we have more news, we'll send you an additional update. Your support has been invaluable in helping her on her journey to become a life changer. Thank you!



Watch how well Fern is
doing with Laura by going to:
guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-fern



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Fern is a quick learner with a loving and bright personality.

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Laura, Fern's trainer



The gentle leader

The gentle leader is a type of head collar which fits around a dog's head, avoiding pressure on their throat and chest. It has been designed to help dogs walk in a calm and sensible way, without pulling, scavenging or lunging towards distractions. This tool is particularly useful for guide dogs in training as it can improve focus during walks, helping them maintain a balanced pace and, consequently, create the right guiding tension. All our dogs are familiarised with it in case they need to use it with their future owner.



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