



“GET BACK HERE!”

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

I had paddled just about a hundred yards into Seneca Lake this summer when I heard a scream that more funny than alarming. I turned back to the shore and there was my dog, Tortellino, at the end of the tether staring at me bouncing on his two hind legs, front paws in the air as if to say “GET BACK HERE!” After catching my breath from laughing I paddled back toward him. As soon as he could reach me he hopped right up on my standup paddleboard (SUP), ready to take in some time on the lake. Now, it probably helps that I have a water dog, but I hear a lot of folks in the Finger Lakes region saying “let’s try to get the dog on the board” so here is a how-to.

If you’re wondering what this has to do with “Life in Balance” – this is one of the simple pleasures in life that I can be 100% present to. Maybe it becomes one of yours too.

Of course, make sure your dog is healthy enough to swim. Even if the plan isn’t for him to get in the water, he or she might end up there. Also, try paddling on your own first so you can get your own footing before adding four more. The dog will sense your energy, and you don’t need a nervous dog on your day off.

1. Make your life easy and start training before you get in the water. Get your dog comfortable with the board on dry land. I got my dog in November, hoping to be able to take him out on the lake in the summer so I took the fin off of my board and placed it in my basement, the same way it would float on the water. (Take the fin off, so

the dog doesn’t break it on dry land.) Every time Tortellino engaged with the paddleboard, I gave him a treat. At first he would just look, sniff or put one paw up on the board; he would get a treat for that and then eventually when he got all four paws on the board, he would get excited. Anytime I walked into the basement he would follow walk on the board, waiting for his treat or simply being proud of himself. It seems silly but it paid off. The first time we took the board into the water – fin back on of course - he ran right for it and hopped on..

2. Check the weight that your board holds. What might be fine for you might not be fine when you add your hundred-pound Labrador Retriever.

3. Get a life vest that fits your dog well. Some dogs will prefer to stay on the SUP and some will prefer to jump in the water and swim. It may even vary day to day depending on the temperature, or if they see say, a duck, just out of reach they want to try to make it to. You may hit a wave, lose your balance and both end up in the water. Even if your dog is a GREAT swimmer, the benefit of the life vest is the that is has a handle so you can place your dog back up on the board rather than have to wrap your arms around him. He’ll natural put his front paws up on the board when he wants to come back on.

4. Lower your expectations. Be prepared for your dog to move on the board. My dog often walks between my feet, hangs out over the edge of the board – it provides a sneaky core workout. This is not the time to try to hit a new

speed record. Just remind yourself you are out on the water to have fun and enjoy some quality time in nature. You might need to come back early if the dog is thirsty or tired. It’s okay.

5. Movement. If the dog leans left, shift your own body weight to the right and vice versa. If there’s too much movement that you feel flustered just sit down or kneel and paddle around. When approaching a wave, just as you would alone, let the nose of your board hit the wave at a 90-degree angle. Sometimes with the combined weight of the two of us I’m surprised how much more easily we go over the waves than I would alone. Also, as fun as it might be to watch your dog enjoy himself on the board – do stay aware of your surroundings and remember to look up and out.

6. Get a dry bag that you can attach to your board. One morning Canandaigua Lake was so serenely calm I let Tortellino’s leash just rest on the board for a quick paddle. He had such a blast that he dunked us both into the water and I couldn’t find the leash. I had to figure out how to get us back to the parking lot without a leash. I used my ankle leash but wouldn’t want to do that again.

7. Consider grabbing an anchor you can use to take breaks. It is after all, supposed to be about the journey not the destination. Usually in my dry bag I have some water and a small dish so there’s no rush for us to get back to shore. Other questions? Email [Kaitlyn@tozziyoga.com](mailto:kaitlyn@tozziyoga.com) and let me know how it goes!

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