

Electric collars for dogs inhumane and should be banned

By LIANG XUTIAN, Today Online, November 10, 2020



The writer's dogs Goji (left), a French bulldog estimated to be five years old, and Solomon (right), a 1.5-year-old "Singapore Special", otherwise known as a mongrel. Both dogs use harnesses on walks and are trained with positive reinforcement techniques, such as rewards and praise.

I write in response to Mr Gerald Tan Han Jie's letter, "Don't ban e-collars for dogs; educate owners or regulate use instead" (Nov 8). The use of electric collars (e-collars) has no place in humane methods of dog training as many research studies have shown. Many reputable dog training organisations and certifying bodies have echoed this view.

Unfortunately, there are trainers who are misleading dog owners into believing that dog obedience must be achieved only by the use of e-collars. It is a growing trend for dog owners to send their dogs to board and train with these trainers for 14 days.

Puppies as young as six months old are seen walking in the park with e-collars. They are not allowed to be themselves by sniffing or smelling their environment.

Their body language is tense and filled with anxiety. These dogs are expected to walk in line with their owners and have their eyes constantly fixed on their owners.

This level of obedience is often required in working police or military dogs. And yet, this level of precision can be achieved without the use of e-collars in the working dog industry. If that is so, why are we using e-collars for domesticated dogs? Unless used with impeccable timing and at a high-enough voltage to suppress certain behaviours, e-collars do not teach the alternative desired behaviour. Instead, they raise welfare concerns. Twenty years ago, it was believed that pet owners should dominate their dogs, thus resulting in training methods of pinning them down, strangling them, kicking them or shaking their neck.

Now, the focus is on minimising welfare issues for dogs, fostering a good relationship with the owner, with the same goal of teaching the alternative behaviour by choosing training solutions that are “least intrusive, minimally invasive”. Mr Tan wrote that the intensity of the shock by an e-collar that pet owners feel is similar to, or even stronger than, what dogs can feel. Ultimately, the dog is the user and, among dogs, there are different levels of reaction to the same level of shock. Some dogs have been seen to jump and bolt when shocked, while others may twitch. It is also the unpredictability of the timing of the shock that is a welfare issue. The writer cannot draw these conclusions by experimenting it on himself because he knows exactly when the shock will be delivered. Numerous studies show that there are far more humane methods of training dogs. It is a lifelong journey with your dog as behaviours are reinforced every day of its life. An outright ban is necessary, as trainers who are supposed to be experts in this field are choosing this method for their clients without giving other more humane and equally effective reward-based methods a chance. It does not matter whether the users are certified or regulated; the tool itself has no place in the humane training of dogs and opens the way for potential abuse.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Dr Liang Xutian runs a veterinary practice in Clementi.

Read more at <https://www.todayonline.com/voices/electric-collars-dogs-inhumane-and-should-be-banned>.