

Dakota, affectionately known as “Kota”, is a long-haired German Shepherd with a hint of something else that gives him a white spot on his chest and a straighter back than most American GSDs.

He was rescued by a UC Irvine student from the shelter when he was three months old. Unfortunately, she lived in an apartment, with two roommates, worked on campus and traveled with the college volleyball team so he didn’t get a lot of attention during his first month in a real home. She needed to let Kota go. Her mother posted a help request on the PTA e-mail list at our daughter’s elementary school.

This was perfect for us. We had no male dogs – nor any large dog – since Gryphon (our Shepherd-mix) passed in 2010. Michael wanted (needed) a canine companion that wasn’t a little, female pup. We also loved German Shepherds. We met Kota’s “caretaker” in a local park and we – and our small dogs – got along with him wonderfully. So she tearfully gave him up to us.

Of course he was rambunctious. He was a boy puppy with lots of energy. During the next few months, he helped us choose which furniture to replace. As he got bigger, the smaller dogs learned to stay to one side so they didn’t get trampled. He still thought he was small himself, though, as he remained in his little bed until he had outgrown it and he kept trying to crawl under tables and through the puppy gates that he once squeezed into. [see the consecutive dog bed photos in Kota’s Gallery]

Once he calmed down, a bit, we signed him up for Basic Obedience at Sirius K9 Academy where he learned proper behavior and demeanor. We taught him in Russian since the girls all still spoke it. After graduation, he attended Intermediate Obedience at Sirius as well where he honed some of his skills and learned to work with us and with other dogs without being too distracted.

Kota is very smart and picked up on most instruction right away. He was also the first dog we had who figured out how to use our dog door without teaching or even prompting. He also has a knack for opening gates and doors when we failed to completely secure them. He mostly did that to show off as in “Look what I can do” or “See, you didn’t lock me in” rather than to do anything on the other side of the obstacle.

Kota took to the bike-mounted leash right away, loving the excuse to go running alongside Patricia. Plus, if Michael didn’t get up by 6:30 a.m. to take him for a walk-run each morning, he would remind him by acting as the alarm clock. He’s a great companion and a fun, playful dog who comfortably watches over our family each night.