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**LASSIE, WERE READY FOR YOUR CLOSE-UP**

[Sunday Mirror](#), [Dec 18, 2005](#) by [Words: Rhiannon Vivian](#)

We needed a dog with the right attitude and look, says Jules Trottmann, from animal training company Birds & Animals Unlimited. Jules, 35, has been training dogs since she was 19, and was responsible for finding not one, but two Lassie-a-likes.

We try and use rescue dogs most of the time, but Lassies look was too specific for that, she says. Out of the dogs we had, director Charles Sturridge picked Mason, who you see in the film. Shes perfect for the job that great mix of brave and bold. We then trained one of the other dogs as a stunt double, for all the running and fighting scenes, to save Mason for the close-ups.

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Staying true to the original Lassie stories, the film is set in pre-WW2 Britain. A Yorkshire family, the Carraclouchs, realise they are too poor to keep their collie Lassie, so sell her to the Duke of Rudling (Peter O'Toole). His chief kennelman Eddie Hynes (Steve Pemberton) makes Lassies life a misery. The film then follows her escape from the Duke and her eventful journey home.

The film opens with a massive hunt scene, complete with horses, actors, Lassie, a pack of 30 hounds and a fox. Jules helped train six of the pack so they could be used in close-ups.

That scene was hell to coordinate, she laughs. It helped that Id raised the fox, Thumper, as a tiny baby. Shed been rescued, as her family had been destroyed. I have three dogs at home, so she is more than used to being around them. However, we obviously couldnt have her and the untrained hounds in the same scene. She was as bold as anything the trained dogs were more scared of her. She doesnt live in my house, though I wouldnt leave her with my pet monkeys. She stays at the studios.

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Along with eight other trainers, Jules spent months before shooting building a good relationship with Mason, getting her used to the on-set environment and all the actors. Once filming started, she had to make sure Mason followed her cues.

There are some difficult scenes, like the one where Eddie Hynes (Pemberton) catches her in a net, says Jules. We treat these scenes like a game, so shes not remotely worried, all the while making the tone of voice louder and sterner. We treat the more boisterous scenes as a play fight, and she actually found them fun. She knew nothing bad would happen.

Steve Pemberton spent plenty of time getting to know Mason, so she wouldnt be scared of him. My character is horrible, and beats Lassie, making her run away back to Yorkshire, he says. Mason and I had several training sessions before we filmed together. I got more into my character and became more and more aggressive in my tone of voice. But by that time she thought it was a game and was really quite happy.

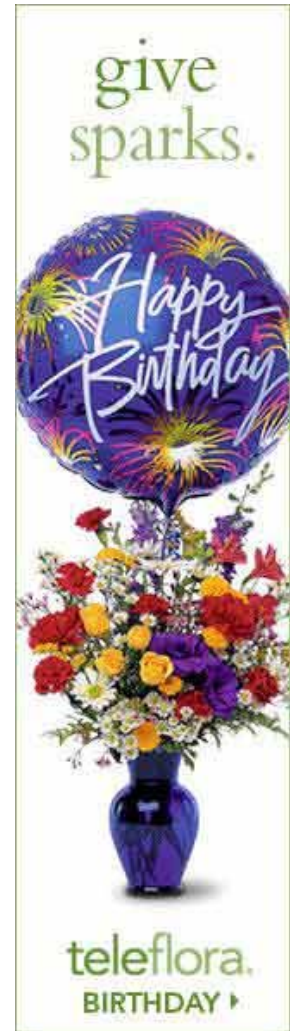
According to Jules, there are simple techniques to making Mason appear scared. We taught her to walk away backwards and to lower her head, as if cowering. These are just simple trained commands that a dog can do on cue, just like lying down. The film-makers dub some whimpering over the top, and the viewer will think shes scared.

Child actors Hester Odgers and Jonathan Mason were the most taken with Mason. The kids had a great rapport with her, says Jules. It was like she was part of the family. It was really hard to say goodbye to her, especially for the kids. But who knows, perhaps therell be more Lassie films to come

Lassie is in cinemas now

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
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