**Q. I have aa new puppy that will be microchipped, I am worried this may hurt and he will no longer like going to the vets. What is the best approach?**

A. Top marks for thinking ahead, there is lots you can do. It is important to make any visit to the vet a pleasant experience, even a simple health check. This is to help reduce the possibility of an unpleasant association. Some dogs take things in their stride others become anxious or fearful. Ideally you should be taking your puppy to the vet several times before he is examined or has his vaccinations or is microchipped (he can be carried). During these visits you will be habituating him to the vet centre, (he will be learning that sounds, sights and smells in this context are OK). During the visit, play with him and offer small high value treats. If the vet staff have time, they should make a fuss and offer food treats too, while allowing him to explore different rooms and if possible, be lifted onto an examination table, be given a treat and then popped back on the floor. Always give a command before lifting so the dog knows he is about to fly! This doesn’t mean that during any upcoming procedure your puppy will just sail through the experience, but it does make a difference. With reduced anxiety comes reduced pain and fear-based behaviours. At home, introduce your puppy to being handled gently and touched all over, scruff a little of his neck while being stroked and fussed (in preparation for microchipping only), hold his feet, lift his tail and open his mouth. Get him used to being at table height, safety is paramount. If this is carried out daily, then it will not be as alien at the vets. Practice a sit and ‘watch me’, for very short periods to teach your puppy to focus on you briefly, always useful in later situations. Your puppy’s brain is young and developing which means they will quickly loose interest, so training should just be a couple of minutes at a time. Make sure you can be with your puppy during his microchipping, this should not be questioned. This use of a high value treats like sausage, should be allowed too. Before the chip is implanted gain his attention on the treat by using your ‘watch command’ and reward straight away, keep feeding the treats without further commands (unless he is fidgety) *at the same time they insert the microchip*. Insertion should be brief, in most situations where I help my wife with microchipping the dogs are unaware of the procedure! Practice fun training, use reward for all calm behaviour and this should help for now and with later procedures.

**Q. I have ‘charged’ my dog to a clicker, what is the next step?**

A. Last month’s article explained about ‘charging’ using classical conditioning. Your dog will know that a ‘click’ means a reward is coming, the next steps in training your dog is to apply operant conditioning. In basic terms your dog will learn that they will gain a ‘click’ if they carry out the desired behaviour and get nothing if they don’t, learning through the outcomes of their own behaviour. Let’s take an easy example in brief, teaching a dog to sit on command. Remember your ‘start’ command, remember to have pea sized treats at the ready, not to use your voice (at all) during clicker training (at least at this point- more difficult for some of you!) and that all training should be fun. This method uses a treat held between your first finger and thumb, practice twisting and turning your hand with the treat facing your dog. Your aim is to ‘lure’ your dog, in other words wherever your hand goes your dog follows. Allow them time, so move your hand at the right pace and height, too fast and they don’t see it and too slow or high means they may grab at you. If they grab and you move the treat away, some dogs will no longer ‘trust’ the lure and will give up following you (another example of operant conditioning!). By using the lure method, bring your dog in front of you, raise their head up and back slightly so their bottom drops down, when in a sit ‘click’ and treat! Carry this out until at least 9 times out of 10 your hand movement lures your dog to a sit. When consistent, pair the ‘sit command’ with your dog’s sit, back to voice and classical conditioning again! Later the command should trigger a sit action. Remember you can slowly reduce the number of treats (schedule of reinforcement) and use your ‘finish command’ at the end of training. Enjoy your training!