

TRAINING AN IQ ZOO RABBIT

Rabbits are a kind of rodent, related to rats and mice. Rabbits are plant eaters (vegetarians) and feed on grass, roots, and parts of trees. Rabbits are usually timid and slow moving. Sometimes though, a rabbit will defend itself, its home, and its young; and a frightened rabbit can run very, very fast. Rabbits must be handled carefully so as not to frighten them; it is difficult to train a frightened rabbit.

IQ ZOO rabbits are a special kind called "Dutch belted." Dutch belted rabbits are more active and colorful than most. This breed is easy to raise and smaller than the large New Zealands, Belgians, and other rabbits raised for meat production. Dutch belted are common in most areas of the United States.

Even though rabbits are slow-moving, the training program is much the same as with other animals. When the rabbit does the right thing, you say YES with the feeder. Even though the rabbit will often times be slow going to the feeder, the rabbit hears the feeder very well and knows what it means.

Rabbits have some of the same kinds of behavior that chickens and ducks have. As their means of PROGRESSION, they walk (hop), run (very fast hopping), and jump; of course the way in which they walk is a bit different! A rabbit can also scratch, but it scratches with its two front feet in quite a different pattern from the chicken's

scratch pattern. The rabbit also can bite, tug, and pull with its mouth.

The Fire Chief Rabbit

This show includes a progression and pulling response. The pulling response is much like the motion rabbits in the wild use to peel the bark from small trees. The Fire Chief Rabbit action takes place in a small area which includes a holding room for the rabbit and a rabbit-sized fire truck, equipped with a special lever. The rabbit must leave its holding room, go to the fire truck, stand in the truck, and pull a lever three to seven times to be rewarded.

A feeder conditioned rabbit is first taught to mouth and then pull a lever shaped and mounted just like the one of the show equipment. The trainer usually dabs on the lever a little wet, mashed up rabbit food. In short order the rabbit is pulling on the lever. The wet food mash is usually used only on the first day. The trainer rewards the rabbit for every pull for about a day or so. The rabbit must then pull two times, then three, then all the way to seven pulls, to earn its reward.

In the early stages of Fire Chief training, the electric feeder is placed close behind the rabbit, so the rabbit doesn't have far to go for food and also so the rabbit doesn't get "lost" between the lever and the feeder. As strange as it may seem, rabbits have very poor eyesight and can quickly lose their way in unfamiliar areas. If the feeder is moved too far too fast, the rabbit becomes confused and may get lost and frightened and quit working.

Once the rabbit is pulling the lever several times and going to the feeder about two feet away, the rabbit is introduced to the final Fire Chief Rabbit enclosure, complete with opening door, lights, bells and sirens. Now when the door of the holding area opens, fire bells ring. When the rabbit pulls the lever, the siren sounds until the rabbit leaves the truck to return to the holding area. The rabbit must get used to all these new sounds; also it may take several weeks of rehearsal for the rabbit to know where

everything is located relative to everything else. It is very important that in all rabbit IQ ZOO acts, all parts of the equipment are exactly alike in position and in size. If one fire truck is longer than the one the rabbit learned to work on, or if it is placed at a different angle on the "road," or if the door of the holding area opens in a different direction, the rabbit will become very confused and not perform very well until it again becomes used to this "different" Fire Chief setting.

It takes about three to four months to train a new young rabbit to be a Fire Chief Rabbit.