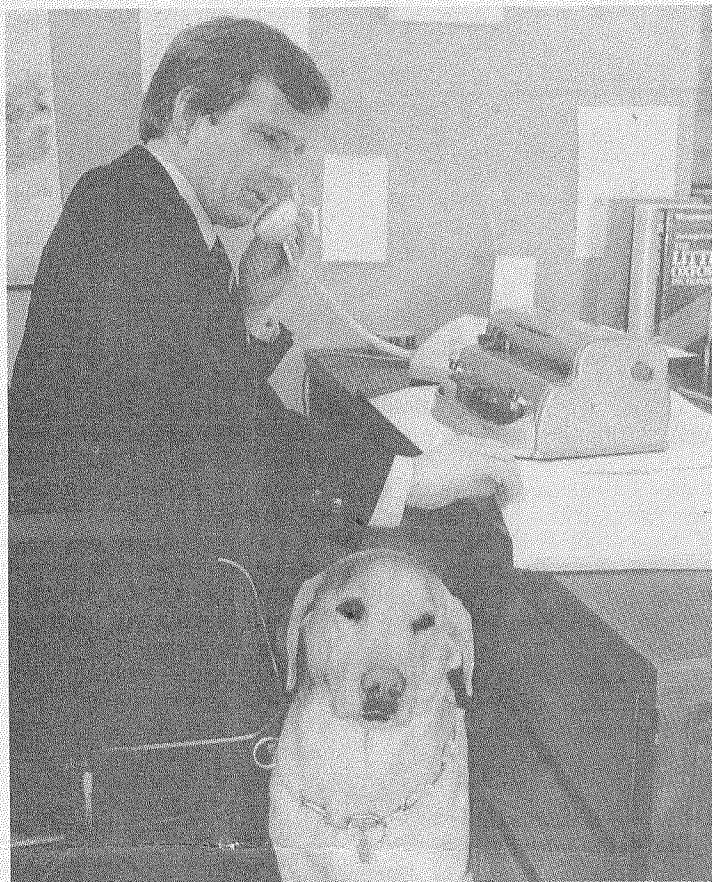


dogs find their way



SPECIAL TRAINING and a special attitude are needed to make a guide dog like Alan, shown here with his master, Steven Gilbert.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ROYAL GUIDE DOGS ASSOCIATIONS OF AUSTRALIA

save the situation is to have an artificial insemination bank for guide dogs on a worldwide basis that everybody can draw on.

The Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia breed roughly between 160 and 180 pups every year. They breed many more than they need and pick only the cream of the crop before the dogs go into training, because the training is what is most costly.

Suitable pups are selected based on a number of criteria such as no cat or dog distraction, no food distraction, not being too nervous, training-oriented character, not easily excitable and not too aggres-

sive. The program has produced a 100 percent success rate at the stage of the second screening. Forty-five percent of all pups bred by the association become guide dogs.

"In Australia, I'm more fortunate because I'm on the job all day," says Conron who specializes only in the breeding and puppywalking programs. "Here in Japan they're doing a bit of everything," he says. The Royal Guide Dogs Associations of Australia have a staff of about 140 people, including 15 professional dog trainers. In contrast, Eye Mate Inc., the oldest guide dog training center in Japan, has eight perma-

institution and the prisoners, producing some 60 guide dogs over a period of 17 years.

The Labradoodle, a cross between the Labrador and the Standard Poodle which does not shed hair, has also gained the institution worldwide publicity as providing guide dogs for people with dog allergies.

The accessibility of guide dogs to public facilities may illustrate the degree of public awareness. Complete access to all is assured by law in Australia, but limited to transportation in Japan. Although the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare sent out an official notice encouraging hotels and restaurants to allow guide dogs to enter their facilities, there are still cases where the dogs are rejected, especially in local areas.

"But I don't want to call our situation 'pitiful,'" says Takao Shioya of Eye Mate Inc., son of Kenichi Shioya who trained the first guide dog in Japan in 1948.

Australia presently has 860 dogs working. Japan has approximately 600. Australia provides guide dogs to some 20 percent of their blind population, and Japan provides to roughly 0.5 percent. The figures, however, may be deceptive in that some countries provide guide dogs to people who still retain minimum vision whereas in Japan only the totally blind are eligible to take guide dogs.

"People tend to label Japanese guide dogs as being inferior to those of Western nations, but I'm confident that guide dogs which graduated from our institution are not at all inferior, and in fact may be superior in some aspects, to guide dogs from other countries," says Shioya.

Roads are comparatively wider in Western countries and the dogs are trained to