

# ANNUAL E-COLLAR REVIEW

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# GUNDOG®

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Dave Morgan's Paladin (SHR Have Gun Will Travel JH CD CA) displays a lot of the breed's joie de vivre fetching a mallard.

# A Dog for ALL SEASONS

The rough-and-tumble Airedale can handle a variety of tasks afield.

BY M.J. NELSON

**A**lmost all hunting dogs are, to some degree, specialists. The retriever breeds and standard poodles are generally at their best when hunting waterfowl. Breeds with the word “pointer” or “setter” in their names, along with Brittany, Spinones, vizslas and Weimaraners are totally in their element when they get a nose full of quail scent. All the spaniels, except the Irish water spaniel, are frequently the breed of choice for dedicated pheasant hunters.

Sure, all these breeds can hunt other types of birds and do a decent job of it. But hunting waterfowl is not where pointing breeds or spaniels really shine, nor are retrievers the sort of upland hunters that wind up as the subject of sporting art. So what does someone do for a dog when they hunt everything, feathered or furry, when there is an open season? Well, they might want to consider an Airedale.

There is an old figure of speech that says a jack-of-all-trades is a master of none. But the validity of this axiom falls apart when the subject is Airedale terriers. Thanks to the efforts of a number of Airedale folks, there are now several Airedales that have earned the designation of “master” as a hunter of waterfowl, upland birds and fur—and their fur hunting capabilities range all the way from rabbits and raccoons to coyotes, bear and pumas.

“Airedales are quite versatile. They’ll pretty much hunt just about anything you’d want to hunt and do a decent job of it,” says Dale Burrier, a long-time Airedale owner and hunter. “They’re not going to give you the sort of classic work you’d look for in a pointer or a spaniel on upland birds, nor will they knock your socks off with their ability as a waterfowl dog. But they’re more than adequate hunting all gamebirds, plus they’re pretty darned good fur hunters also. Airedales will always surprise you, if not astound you, in the field.”

Chris Halvorson agrees. “My dad ‘brainwashed’ me into thinking that Airedales are the best breed because they could do everything—hunt, guard the family and still have the temperament to be part of the family rather than living out in a kennel or in the barn, as so many other hunting or farm dogs did in those days,” she recalls.

“While I started with the breed in the show and obedience rings, I noticed how much more fun the Airedales in our breed club’s hunting events had when they did field work. Even though I started with little personal interest in hunting, my dogs’ enthusiasm for the hunt pulled me into the field. Now the hours we spend hunting are the best times for both my dogs and me.

“This is a multi-dimensional breed,” she continues. “Airedales are called a ‘three-in-one gun dog’ since they can hunt fur, waterfowl and upland birds. But they also come with a wicked sense of humor and some stubborn, independent thinking—call it terrier tenacity—which means they’re not your average hunting dog. If you can’t laugh at yourself and your dog, don’t get an Airedale.”

David Morgan notes, “Airedales are incredibly gifted natural hunting dogs but they are not a natural retriever or spaniel. Their gameness is less than that of, say, Patterdale or fell terriers but greater than any of the sporting breeds except, possibly the Chesapeake Bay retriever, in my opinion.

“Like Chessies, Airedales guard but they guard people, not property. They can be hard-mouthed and hard-headed at times but they will rip through 10 feet of wild brambles to dig out a bird. Some people call them stubborn but they’re really independent. In fact, they

## A DOG FOR ALL SEASONS

will ignore an e-collar at any level if it's worth it to them.

"They're not as fast as a field-bred Labrador but they are tenacious to a fault. They will carry a line but they can be pulled off by scent. They don't really slip whistles; they just get fixated on their own plan. But they do not pass birds and that's a real plus," Morgan concludes.

"Airedales are a good three-way hunting dog," says Michael Sites. "They have good noses, they track well and they can retrieve on either land or water. They also have great prey drive and endurance. While our current Airedale is the first one we've trained for hunting, she has not been difficult to train.

"One thing we did discover early on in her training, however, is that you have to keep them engaged and interested. You can't repeat the same training exercise over and over or they get bored. You have to do something two or three times and then move on to something different with this breed because they need stimulation to stay focused.

"Kira can be tough-as-nails stubborn if she's mad at you for some reason. If she's unhappy, she will give you 'the look.' So it's really important to take the time to learn about the breed and to learn how to train them. They're like teenagers in many ways. They need a

reason to be and they need direction."

Ron Swisher says, "We chose Airedales because they are very versatile and they are also loyal companions that are always ready to go. They're people-oriented dogs that don't do well in a kennel. One real plus for the breed is that they shed very little. However, their coats need to be clipped or stripped.

"While there seem to be more successful Airedale upland dogs, they can hunt waterfowl if they are started young with the right kind of training in an appropriate setting. I'd say the one big issue with the breed at the moment is breeding Airedales for their hunting and

plished hunters and retrievers had German working dogs in their pedigrees and our current female's pedigree is 75 percent German working lines and 25 percent American obedience/show dog lines."

Dale Burrier disagrees with this assessment. "While it is true that, unlike the sporting breeds, we don't have generations of field-titled dogs in our pedigrees, I don't think it is totally accurate to say that there are no hunting or working lines established in the United States," he says. "Even during the 90 or so years when there was not a lot of selective breeding for field ability, there were breeders who diligently preserved

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"Airedales are quite versatile. They'll pretty much hunt anything you'd want to hunt and do a decent job of it."

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working ability in sufficient numbers to maintain a breeding pool from which to draw in addition to adhering to the breed standard.

"As it is, no hunting or working lines have been established in the United States. Both of our Airedales that were accom-

plished by the breed's ability to hunt and you'll find many of the dogs from the lines established by these older breeders appearing in the pedigrees of the dogs that are successful in the field today.

"There are breeders who bred and breed purposefully for hunting ability

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SHR Seneca's Scarlett von Summitt MH JHF JHR ("Scarlett"), Ron Swisher's Airedale, makes an enthusiastic water entry at a hunt test.



but more who breed specifically for the ability to do a lot of different things and these are the dogs that have provided the foundation for the Airedale's success as hunting dogs and in the hunt test programs," Burrier adds.

"There may be few pure 'hunting and working' lines in the U.S. but there are plenty of lines that can handle the hunting and working tasks. What's more, these dogs look like how the breed standard says they should look."

Chris Halvorson says, "The best hunting Airedales are the high-drive dogs. But most of these dogs are not born with biddability as one of their virtues. Airedales are natural hunters but unless you train them to hunt with you, they'd just as soon run off and hunt on their own. The late, great dog writer Dave Duffey nailed it when he said, 'Think of the Airedale as a cross between a Chesapeake Bay retriever and an Irish water spaniel and train accordingly.' To train an Airedale, the challenge is appreciating and molding its strong independent spirit and quirky sense of humor into a partnership with you.

"Many Airedales hunt slower and more methodically than the flashier field-bred cockers, springers or retrievers but then again the Airedale's good nose finds birds where others miss them. It can be challenging finding a pup to hunt for you but we do have a breed club, Hunting Working Airedales, that has a breeder referral page on its website. Breeders listed there are club members who make hunting and performance one of their main criteria for planning breedings.

"If that doesn't work out, at least get a quality pup from a breeder who's a member of the breed's parent club, the Airedale Terrier Club of America (ATCA). Such pups should come from parents with OFA health checks and a guarantee of breeder responsibility for the dog's lifetime. Even litters that weren't specifically bred for field work will have pups that could be good hunting dogs.

"Do take the time to test and compare the pups within any given litter. Look for the bold and active pup who likes to chase anything that moves and isn't fazed by any loud noise you can make," she concludes. "Pick the naughtiest little devil in the litter and shape him into your hunting dog." \*



© CHRIS HALVORSON

Coldstream Born in the USA MH SHV MHF MHFur CD RA GD ("Bruce") is Chris Halvorson's Airedale and is the first male in the breed to have earned an AKC master hunter title.



Aircraft Kira Stella Sites MH SHV MHFur GD CGC ("Kira"), Michael Sites' Airedale, brings home a pheasant.

