

## Airedale Terrier – the Breed that Has it All



**Susan Rodgers with Multi Ch. Devonshire's Celtic Pride - Baxter in his old age (sire of Ch. Stirling Skeandhu) and Must be Magic Camelot for Stirling - Sarah as a puppy.**  
Photo by Jo Pemble

**There is a big pine tree in Monson, Massachusetts. Two Airedales are welcoming us in the front yard while we are approaching their home. You can hear the rest of the pack from the kennel. "This is a paradise for Airedale dogs," I thought when I first saw the property of Susan Rodgers and Shirley Good. They arranged everything just right so it offers full comfort to dogs and to people who share the living space with them.**

**I visited Stirling Kennels for the first time back in 2008 when I was looking for the most suited mating partner for my Nala. I was looking for consistency across several generations of a certain line of Airedales. They had photos and videos of dogs on the internet, yet I couldn't hide my admiration watching them live in the kennel. The visit to Stirling Kennels offered a remarkable experience, and I have been visiting them at least once a year ever since. Susan Rodgers became my mentor, willing to share her knowledge and insights. When you enter her world of dogs, you realize that even if you'd read all the books about breeding dogs, you'd still know almost nothing compared to Susan's wealth of gathered wisdom about dog breeding.**

## What's your story Susan?

Shirley Good and I came from families that always had dogs. Shirley's father had Dalmations running with the horses in his Ontario, Canada livery business. My grandfather brought an Airedale bitch from Northern Ireland when he immigrated to New England at the beginning of the 20th century. He bred her on his way to their new home while en route through Canada and she delivered her new litter of 10 Airedales upon arrival. Thus began three generations of passion with the Airedale.

My mother owned Airedales and I was given a puppy in the mid 1950s which I showed very successfully. In 1965 with a second bitch I bred my first litter and showed a young male from that litter. There were few mentors and no junior handling programs so not surprisingly, I was not very successful.

I met Shirley in the 1970s and decided breeding and showing would be a great sport for two and we introduced my middle name Stirling as our Kennel prefix. In 1997 we changed our breeding focus and purchased Ch Spindletop Crossfire and AM CAN Ch Greenfield Captain Jack. Pairing "Gillis" and "Jack" began a dynasty of top winners through developing a program of close linebreeding.

We both joined the Airedale Terrier Club of America in 1979 and I have served on the Board of Directors, Chaired the Breeders Education Committee and was charged with rewriting the Illustrated Standard of the Airedale. We have also been members of the Airedale Club of New England where I have been a 50 year member, serving as president, treasurer, and currently as secretary.



At Hatboro dog show 2015. From right Frank Stevens, Susan Rodgers and Meta Zakrajšek. Photo by Jo Pemble

### **What is so special about Airedales?**

My family has had **Airedales since 1912** and has rarely been without one, occasionally adding a small terrier or two. However there has never been a breed to equal the Airedale in intelligence, versatility, humor, patience and courage. Beginning 35 years ago Shirley and I have owned a boarding kennel, bringing a wide variety of breeds into our lives. While many breeds have special qualities, none quite compare with the breed that has it all..... the **Airedale Terrier. They are outstanding hunters, herders, guardians and baby sitters.**

As a companion, Airedales are **intuitive** and often described as **having human eyes**. Once you have had an Airedale, no other breed will do.

It should be kept in mind however that the **Airedale's intelligence** can pose a challenge for the owner. This breed becomes **easily bored and self entertainment** can result in destructive behavior. They are a **training challenge** and learn best by negotiation do not appreciate repetition; while some breeds enjoy retrieving a ball multiple times an Airedale will quickly let you know that 3 times is too much as he learned it the first time. You would know that, don't you, Meta? Big smile.



**Stirling Maximus Aurelius Must be Magic** - Boston, 8 months old. Bred by Susan Rodgers & Meta Zakrajšek, owned by Meta Zakrajšek. Photo by Blaž Košak



## Most definitely. What Do You Think the Airedale will look like in 2050?

This is a difficult question to answer. The Airedale standard originally written in 1877 still holds today and has not been changed. The original standard better describes the breed today than it did 100 years ago. What was written seemed visionary by the original designers of the breed. As described in the Standard, **today we see more dogs with shorter backs, higher tail sets, better laid back shoulders**. While these changes have brought a degree of "prettiness" to the breed, in actuality higher tail sets mean more strength to the rear as **Airedales are rear driven**. **Better shoulder lay back** affords easy carrying of prey and absorbing the shock of landing whether jumping off the porch or in obedience or agility. **The hope is that over the next 3 decades the breed will see fewer dogs with straight shoulders and long necks with the incorrect "fish hook" front**. Short necks and long necks are equally incorrect for this versatile breed. Also the hope for the future is more short, strong backs as **long backs are weak** and tend to sag with age, increasing chances of spinal and shoulder arthritis. We have the international connections, the sharing of information and the technology to bring our dogs closer to the standard.



Left: **Ch. Stirling Take a Walk on the Wildside**, bred by Jeannie & Tom Dilworth, owned by Susan Rodgers & Tom Dilworth, shown by R.C. Carusi.

Right: **Glenroyal Stirling Badge of Courage**, bred by Jo Pemble, owned by Jo Pemble, shown by Meta Zakrajšek. Photo by Jo Pemble

## What contributes to a winning Airedale?

Breeding a winning Airedale often happens by chance and can be difficult to replicate. Breeding a line of winners true to type is an endeavor requiring more than luck and does not happen by chance but **by passion and dedication**.

Winning begins with purchasing or breeding the dog of your dreams assuming you fully understand the standard and can actually apply it. At this early stage a mentor can make a significant difference along the way to success.

**No dog no matter how promising is born a winner.** Much is involved between promising puppyhood to performance in the ring. All dogs require long term preparation. We'll just discuss preparation relative to the Airedale.



**Stirling Maximus Aurelius Must be Magic** - Boston, 8 weeks old. Sired by **Ch. Stirling Take a Walk on the Wildside**, bred by Susan Rodgers & Meta Zakrajšek, owned by Meta Zakrajšek. Photo by Jo Pemble

There is no significant order to the factors essential to success as they are of equal importance and all begin in puppyhood.

**Socialization** began hopefully with the breeder through selection of a dam with all the correct elements that make up the Airedale.

Airedale puppies need to be given every opportunity to be outgoing, inquisitive, cocky and never shy. Shy, retiring puppies rarely do well in the ring.

**Feeding** is always a controversial topic and won't bring any agreement here. But Airedales do not thrive nor grow the heavy, oiled thick coat without some raw protein in the diet. If you are dedicated to feeding dry food, add a quality meat, yogurt, eggs, or fish daily. Chicken necks, backs or wings make a good meal that provide everything a dog needs for healthy bone and joints. Airedale puppies won't be down on their pasterns if they eat raw chicken bones daily as calcium combined with the other essential minerals provide for excellent bone and joint growth.

**Conditioning** an Airedale emphasizes the rear assembly. The Airedale like most long legged terriers require strong rear legs, good angulation, full butts and heavy muscle in the thighs and over the knees. At Stirling we have found that competitive exercise works well. Our dogs run against each other or a dog in for boarding. The runs are slightly sloped to add resistance when returning to the building and at the end of the downward slope the dog stands with his rear and tail slightly higher encourages rear strength and improves the tail set.

While conditioning your youngster for the show ring, it's important to know that **ears add a final touch to the Airedale's presence**. Some puppies seem born with perfect ears, while others have too high, too low or flyaway ears. Many breeders have found it effective to set the ears as soon as 8 weeks. However there is no magic age for ear setting as some breeders wait until the head gives an idea of adult length or during serious teething from 4-7 months. Occasionally a puppy may need setting for the entire first year to achieve the look of the "King of the Terriers". One final thought on ears: if your puppy runs with a family pack, remember he is on the bottom of the dominance order and will hold his ears low in a non threatening manner which will prevent his ears from achieving that beautiful look at adulthood.

Now that you have your dog ready to make his show debut, you need to be prepared to **present him at his best**. This will be helped by your mentor or a handler. It's helpful to sit at the terrier ring and watch many breeds being shown and judged.



**Ch. Stirling Skeandhu - Fraser.** Bred by Susan Rodgers & Dr. Shirley Good, sire of **Ch. Stirling Take a Walk on the Wildside**

### **What are the most important characteristics to select when breeding?**

I don't think there is one single trait upon which to base a breeding program such as the head which the judge see first or the head "Defines" the breed. To focus on a single trait neglects the whole dog to the eventual detriment of the breed. No breeder has a hope of success with this limited approach. **As with everything in life, moderation takes us the distance.** A flashy dog may be a big winner and bring you temporary fame but he will rarely breed true. An excellent litter brother may breed many specialty winning offspring and continue the true breed type for generations while the well known brother produces a few nice dogs.

**A single fault can't be corrected without including the entire dog.** You may breed to an outstanding head but gain a major fault such as low tail set or soft coat. This set back often happens when breeders don't take time to look at the stud of choice's parents or siblings or offspring if possible.

**Many breeders have "must have" traits when breeding. At Stirling we have learned the standard is the goal...a package of correct characteristics.**



**Ch. Stirling Take a Walk on the Wildside**, bred by Jeannie & Tom Dilworth, owned by Susan Rodgers & Tom Dilworth, shown by R.C. Carusi, sire of **Stirling Maximus Aurelius Must be Magic**. Photo by Jo Pemble

**Thank you Susan for sharing your knowledge and experience with us.**

**Meta Zakrajšek**

**[www.stirlingairedales.com](http://www.stirlingairedales.com)**

**[www.mustbemagic.si](http://www.mustbemagic.si)**