

Is an Airedale the Right Breed for Your Family?

Do you love the way the Airedale looks? Many people buy an Airedale for the way it looks, not realizing what a high maintenance dog an Airedale is, high maintenance in terms of grooming, exercise and attention required. Please think carefully about whether an Airedale will fit your lifestyle.

Do you want a dog that will sit at your feet, quietly, most of the time? That is not an Airedale.

Do you have a sense of humor? Do you want a dog that is inventive, clever, finds each day a grand adventure, wants to supervise and help with your every activity, and is loyal and loving to those he respects? Are you looking for a buddy to join you for long walks, or hunting, backpacking, agility, canoeing, skiing, hiking? Perhaps an Airedale is for you.

I cannot emphasize enough how much energy an Airedale has and how important it is to find positive outlets for that energy. If your current lifestyle is already packed with activity, an Airedale is not a dog you can fit in around the edges. An Airedale will not wait patiently for you to find the time to play with him. And don't expect to be able to stick him in the back yard to exercise himself or think that tossing a ball a few times is going to be enough. Providing an Airedale with adequate exercise requires your active participation.

When you add an Airedale puppy to your life, you should consider that you are taking on a second full-time job, or adding another child to your family -- a child needing just as much attention and perhaps ****more**** loving supervision than the two-footed kind. A great adult Airedale requires that you spend a lot of time with him as a puppy. Everyone in the household has to be willing to make changes and compromises to accept life with an Airedale as a member of the family.

Are Airedales Good with Children? It depends on the Airedale and it depends on the child, but mostly it depends on the adults, especially the adult who is primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the home.

Most young Airedales are a whirlwind of muscle, hard-edged play and head-butting enthusiasm and very sharp puppy teeth. From puppyhood until about two years old, they are a real handful. They need careful training, constant watching and loving discipline. Although they are a challenge for some to train, Airedales love to learn as long as learning

is a game. They will reward your patience and your sense of humor with years of loyalty and devotion.

Airedales are intelligent, sensitive and perceptive. When you get an Airedale, you are making an emotional investment for the next 12-14 years. When the newness of your puppy wears off, you cannot stick him in the back yard, feed him once a day and expect that to be enough. An Airedale not properly socialized and not treated as a member of the family can become neurotic, destructive, dog aggressive or even people aggressive.

Before you make this 12-14 year commitment, read everything you can get your hands on about the breed.

An excellent book is Airedale Terriers : Everything About Purchase, Care, Nutrition, Breeding, Behavior, and Training (Barron's Complete Pet Owner's Manuals) by Dorothy M. Miner. Ms. Miner has been involved in one aspect or another of the dog fancy for over 25 years, mostly with Airedale Terriers.

"Take equal parts of intelligence, strength, heart, and loyalty. Add a generous portion of humor, sensitivity, and high energy. Throw in a pinch of stubbornness and feistiness. Pack this inside a handsome 50- to 70-pound (23-32 kg) dog, and you have the Airedale Terrier. "

Airedale aficionados will be the first to tell you this breed isn't for everybody. Airedales are remarkably strong for a medium-sized breed, strong-willed, and above all, they are terriers. Terriers are known for their high activity level, feistiness, sometimes noisiness (sometimes), and independence. Airedales need considerable amounts of exercise, regular grooming, firm but kind training, and patience. They are puppies for a long time, usually not reaching maturity until after two years of age. Even after that, they retain a mischievous streak that can sometimes get them into trouble. Although it is not usually a problem, some Airedales can exhibit aggression toward other dogs, and prospective owners must be willing to socialize and train their terriers to curb this tendency.

Are you prepared to put up with an Airedale's rowdiness, unique personality, and disruptive antics? More than one Airedale has interrupted a human social gathering to display something fragrant it has just dug up or rolled in, or to show off a dead rodent it was just dying to share. An Airedale can carry an amazing amount of dirt, mud, and burrs in its furnishings or an equally amazing amount of water in its beard just after getting a nice drink. Unfortunately, it's at times like these that an Airedale seems to be particularly desirous of human company and affection.

Airedale puppies are a handful. They have an almost limitless supply of energy and are into something most of the time they are awake. It often seems that the only time they are quiet is when they are asleep. Destructive chewing can be a major problem with young Airedales. It may surprise a new Airedale owner just how quickly furniture can be dismantled if a puppy is left to entertain itself. They are also notorious diggers, and can quickly turn the most elegant landscaping into something resembling Swiss cheese. Some Airedales also have the typically terrier trait of barking at anything they notice, and they notice everything. Squirrels, passing dogs, or pedestrians, and sometimes even clouds and airplanes must be commented on or warned off. In spite of these less than desirable traits, however, Airedales are very trainable. They are also smart enough to realize then they must turn on the charm. They do grow up eventually and are wonderfully devoted, protective, bright, and entertaining companions.

Airedales can make wonderful pals for considerate children. They are active and playful, and not particularly delicate. They are strong and forceful, however, and play sessions should be monitored by an adult. Young Airedales may not be the ideal playmate for toddlers as their rough-and-tumble play may result in the child's being knocked off its feet but, with adult supervision, an Airedale can be a child's best buddy.

The Airedale is a high-maintenance breed. The lovely crisp black and tan coat seen on the show dog is the product of countless hours of plucking, stripping, and grooming. Most pet Airedales are clipped to keep the coat under control, but there is still a fair amount of combing, brushing, and trimming needed to keep the coat in good condition. Left to its own devices the Airedale's coat will grow to the point that the dog will resemble an animated tumbleweed.

Airedales are not good impulse purchases. Buyers must be aware that they are going to be responsible for a living creature with real needs for possibly more than 13 or 14 years. Therefore, consider your lifestyle and your ability to train and care for a dog before jumping into the role of Airedale owner.