

# Executive Summary

This document will provide support for the Airedale Terrier Club of America's (ATCA) request for the admittance of Airedale Terriers to the America Kennel Club (AKC) Hunt Tests for Retrievers and AKC Hunt Tests for Spaniels.

The Airedale Terrier was developed specifically for hunting both fur and feathered game. The men who began the blend of breeds that was to become the Airedale were not gentlemen of the sporting world, but rather practical farmers who needed a game dog that would go after vermin as well as bring in birds for the table. While there is considerable speculation about which mix of breeds contributed to the Airedale, there is no dispute that the end product was a hunter made for purposes well beyond the usual terrier "earth dog" activities.

The introduction of Airedales to North America in the early 1900s brought expanded hunting opportunities for the breed. The Airedale's outstanding performance, both as an efficient farm dog and as hunter of "big game" such as bear and wildcat, soon shaped the breed's reputation. However, early accounts of Airedale hunting also regularly include references to the breed's abilities as a gun dog used to flush and retrieve a variety of land and water fowl. While traditional sporting breeds such as retrievers and spaniels shaped public perception of a "gun dog," there has always been a number of fanciers who continued to use Airedales as bird dogs.

By the mid 1980's, some of these fanciers met through their participation ATCA activities. They determined that there was significant interest among fellow breeders in preserving and developing the Airedale's hunting abilities. In 1985 the ATCA Hunting/Working (H/W) Committee was formed. One of the Committee's first steps was to officially ask the AKC to open its Hunt Tests to Airedale Terriers. That request was denied.

However, with that refusal came the AKC's suggestion that the ATCA develop its own Hunt Test program, and that if Airedales "proved" themselves in those tests, then the request for admission to AKC Hunt Tests would be reconsidered. To that end, the H/W Committee set about developing a program that would meet all the requirements suggested by AKC representatives and eventually lead to admission to AKC Hunt Tests.

In 1986 the H/W Committee held its first national Hunting/Working Weekend. This event brought together Airedales and owners interested in testing the breed's versatility in hunting upland game, waterfowl, and raccoon. Through the H/W Weekends (and year-long efforts between them) the H/W Committee pursued the goal of promoting Airedale hunting activities.

By 1989 the H/W Committee instituted AKC-approved "Guidelines for Experimental Hunt Tests." Those guidelines, and further consultations with AKC officials, led to the development AKC-approved official ATCA Hunt Tests and Hunt Titles in 1993.

The annual H/W Weekends, which would later alternately be called “H/W Nationals,” provided the opportunity for Airedale owners to learn from sporting dog experts the Committee invited to conduct workshops and judge the tests. Official AKC observers also attended on several occasions. The input of the gun dog experts was instrumental in the steady improvement of participating Airedales and their handlers.

The ATCA Board of Directors has consistently supported the H/W Committee efforts, believing that Airedale hunting instinct and practice should be preserved and cultivated to maintain the breed’s original character. This idea also won great support from the ATCA general membership and from Airedale owners not connected with Club activities. ATCA annual H/W Nationals’ entries grew from 36 participants in 1986 to over 70 Airedales in 1998. The H/W National hunting events consistently drew a larger Airedale entry than most AKC conformation shows and certainly more than obedience trials.

In addition, entries for the H/W Nationals held in Ohio in March show a geographical distribution indicating widespread interest. This led to an expanded program of annual regional ATCA Hunt Tests in Wisconsin, Kentucky, and Michigan. Participants in the Nationals have come from Alaska, California, Texas, Florida, New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and all points in between. International interest in ATCA Hunt Tests shows entries regularly coming down from Ontario, Canada, but also from as far as Alberta.

Dog publications have devoted considerable coverage to the revived interest in hunting Airedales. Feature articles, columns, and photos on hunting Airedales have appeared in magazines such as *Gun Dog* and *Petersen’s Hunting Magazine*; *Dog World* and *Dog Fancy*; *Terrier Type*; and last but not least, the *AKC Gazette* has on four occasions devoted print and/or photo coverage to hunting Airedales. The ATCA newsletter, *The American Airedale*, has since its inception chronicled the H/W movement with reports on every event. Using the Internet for even wider exposure, the ATCA official H/W website ([www.airedale.org/hwc](http://www.airedale.org/hwc)) has logged over 14,900 hits since its installation in October, 1997.

The ATCA H/W Committee has kept the AKC apprised of the progress toward meeting AKC requirements. H/W Committee representatives have met with AKC officials from the Performance Division and sent written information with invitations to AKC officials or observers to attend the ATCA Hunting Nationals. Most recent correspondence from H/W Chairman Steve Gilbert to William Speck, Assistant Vice-President of AKC Performance Events, included a personal invitation to attend the H/W Nationals in March, 1999 and join an informal hunting session during that weekend.

As for the dogs themselves, Airedales have proven that the breed still maintains the hunting instincts for which the breed founders were known. Airedales have further shown, that if trained with methods used for other gun dogs, they perform capably in advanced test situations.

Supported by the enclosed documentation, the Airedale Terrier Club of America therefore requests that AKC Hunt Tests for Retrievers and AKC Hunt Tests for Spaniels be open to Airedale Terriers.