

Airedales and Obedience

You can look in many books about Airedales and read about miraculous stories where Airedales bring down bears forty times the size of the dog, rescue schools of drowning children, leap over tall buildings, and conquer evil. I think there could actually be a series on TV "Believe It or Not Airedales!" I am being facetious right now but there are a lot of stories of the incredible antics of the Airedale. Some of my stories involve the sense of humor that comes into play while working with the Airedale and why some obedience books rate the Airedale as being stubborn to train. In fact, the book *The Reform School Handbook of Delinquent Dogs* has the Airedale is proudly displayed in the contents. This is an entertaining book and I recommend it. The author, Tony Wilkinson, gives the Airedale a delinquency rating of "high", a born brawler. Other books also talk about training difficulties pertaining to the Airedale.

I wouldn't say that they are difficult exactly. They actually are easy to train. You just have to understand what the Airedale's opinion is of training exercises. It may be a matter of understanding the body language of this breed and then modifying the training to fit the personality. At any rate here are some of my funnier experiences while obedience training our Airedales.

Jack and the Obedience Class

Early in our marriage, before the ink was dry on the certificate, I got to know David's Airedale, Jack (for Airedale enthusiasts, Jack was a Finlair Tiger son). Jack lived his life as an intact male and when I met him, I thought he was a total male chauvinist. Did I forget to add 'pig' to that statement? I meant male chauvinist pig.

Jack, in turn, thought that women should be barefoot and pregnant. I suppose for an unneutered male dog, this rightfully should be Jack's perspective. However, being newly married and accomplished in my own right (somewhat of a feminist), I strongly objected to Jack's view and subsequent treatment of me. If Jack could have talked, on weekend's, he would have rooted himself in a Lazyboy and bellowed for beer service during commercials. In my eyes, David's dog was just plain rude and unmannerly.

In Jack's eyes, I was a "Biker Chick" who had totally disrupted his bachelor buddy days with David.

I need to add that Jack was far from stupid. Even I could see that he was an intelligent dog. David had entered Jack in a number of obedience classes years before our marriage and Jack would perform numerous and complicated tricks for David.

Years, later, we acquired our first female Airedale, Lady (named Lady in hopes that she would have better manners than the belching/farting studman Jack). I enrolled Lady in an obedience class when she was of sufficient age. We went to a series of classes, which were held once a week. Things were going well until the fourth week when Lady came into heat. I decided not to take her to class, as she was a big airhead.

"Take Jack", David prompted. "He'll love it and you won't miss the next set of exercises."

So I did. At home, Jack would always clown around with me. I was not taken seriously at all. I thought that night's class was going to be a bust but off we went.

When we got to the class site which was held in the parking lot of a veterinary clinic, I became confused as to who the dog was at the end of my leash. Certainly not "Jack the Cool Biker Dude". It must have been his not-so-evil twin, "Champion Jack with A CD Excellent". David never laughed so hard when I got home and told him of Jack's behavior. Jack not only did the basic exercises of "sit", "down", "stay" (we were learning the beginning obedience steps at that time), Jack heeled OFF lead, figure-eight'd around cones OFF lead, and did my personal favorite, "Roll-Over-And-Play-Dead". He was a performing fool. Dedicated to the cause at all times! Never turned his eyes from my face. Waited anxiously for my every command. The trainer was SO impressed with Jack's amazing performance. I clearly knew much more than I had let on. Here was a perfectly trained Airedale. I was the proud momma, glowing in the spotlight.

Class was over all too soon and we trotted to my car. As Jack and I stop and I unlocked the car door, Jack backed up behind me and goosed me really hard with his nose up my behind. I spun around and glared at him, spitting out a "STOP IT!" between clenched teeth—and I SWEAR he was laughing at me, his mouth wide open and teeth showing just a bit, eyes full of twinkle. This

expression, I have learned over the years, is a true-to-Airedale trait. They laugh. Sometimes they laugh with you and sometimes they laugh at you. A laughing Airedale face is worth experiencing if you have never seen it.

The story ended with “Jack the Cool Biker Dude” and I driving home never to see “Jack with the CD Excellent” again. I think he even farted a couple of times in the car.