

Field and Feather

The Retrieving Game

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Welcome to the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever!

Starting June 1, 2002, the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever may participate in AKC Hunting Tests for Retrievers. The Duck Tollers join the Irish Water Spaniel and the Standard Poodle as dogs outside of the traditional retriever breeds to participate in the AKC hunt tests.

These cute little red dogs are not a common site, so I hope that we will have the opportunity to see some of them running tests in the Midwest—maybe I will even get the opportunity to judge one at a hunt test.

According to the AKC:

“The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever (Toller) was developed in the early 19th century. The playful action of the Toller retrieving a stick or ball along the shoreline arouses the curiosity of the ducks offshore. They are lured within gunshot range, and the dog is sent out to retrieve the dead or wounded birds.

This medium sized, powerful, compact, balanced dog is the smallest of the retrievers. The Toller’s attitude and bearing suggest strength with a high degree of agility. He is alert, determined, and quick, with a keen desire to work and please.

Many Tollers have a slightly sad or worried expression when they are not working. The moment the slightest indication is given that retrieving is required, they set themselves for springy action with an expression of intense concentration and excitement. The heavily feathered tail is held high in constant motion while working.

The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club (USA) feels strongly that all Tollers should have these innate abilities, and encourages all Tollers to prove them by passing an approved Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club (USA) field test.”

It is nice to see a retrieving breed that encourages breed owners to participate in approved retriever club field tests to prove the retrieving ability of the breed. Now Duck Tollers can also participate in the AKC hunt tests to further prove retrieving ability and trainability.

To salute the Tollers, I thought it would be fun to talk with some owners about this uncommon breed and how they respond to the retrieving game.

I asked Sue Dorscheid, president of the U.S. The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club, what the petitioning process with AKC had been like. She said, “The process for petitioning AKC was a little difficult. In the past, miscellaneous breeds were not allowed to compete in any breed-specific performance events (herding, earthdog, hunt tests, etc.) Our club, through the work of our AKC liaisons, was able to convince the AKC that Miscellaneous dogs should be allowed to compete in such events. As a result, the rules for Hunt Tests were changed and we will be eligible starting June 1, although we are still a miscellaneous breed. We did have to specify to AKC which type of tests we should be eligible for (e.g. Retriever Hunt Tests as opposed to Pointer). I believe that in the future other Misc breeds will have an easier time of competing in these events because of our work with AKC.”

The Toller breed club is unique in the US in that it requires its dogs to have a field title before the dog can earn the club conformation title. Dorscheid says, "Our club also has a three-level WC (Working Certificate) program, and requires Tollers to pass a basic retrieving test (BRT) before it can earn a club conformation title. Our WC program does include a simulated tolling test at each level." This is a great way for the breed to maintain the basic retrieving and tolling skills and hopefully keep the breed from bifurcating into conformation versus field dogs like we have seen happen in several of the retriever breeds.

Dorscheid has been running her own Tollers in UKC Hunt Tests and club WC tests. She will have a dog running AKC Master and one in AKC Senior this June. Her Master dog has his HRCH title in UKC (their Master equivalent) and the Senior dog has his HR title in UKC. She also hunts over her dogs.

Janice Johnson is a Labrador and Duck Toller owner. She has run her Labs in AKC hunt tests for several years and has also judged. Now she is looking forward to running tests with her Toller.

MK: What attracted you to the Toller?

JJ: Well, starting out I was involved only with Labrador Retrievers since 1986 participating in obedience, tracking, agility, hunt test and even tried conformation for a short time. I was thinking about getting another Lab when two good friends, Julie Hanson and Donna McClellan were getting a Toller from Lonetree Kennels in Michigan. His [the dog's] name was Lonetrees Calvin of Kilcreek. I had never heard of a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever. My first impression was that he was this little red and white fuzz ball with a pink nose. As I watched Calvin grow and mature I quickly realized what a hardy little good-natured breed this really was. His sharp intelligence, versatility, quickness and eagerness to please were a true turn-on for me. And to think that all of these qualities come in a compact size that's easy to transport and doesn't take up a lot of room. So I said "I gotta have one of those little red dogs."

MK: Tell us about the Toller you own.

JJ: My friends Julie and Donna got another Toller (no surprise) Lonetree's 'Lil Journey to Oz and bred her to Cobscook Vermillion Wager. And on May 5th, 1999 five little Tollers were born. My Toller, Kilcreek's Kalila De Mayo, was the fourth one in the birth order. She is now almost three years old and has been a lot of fun to train and have as a loyal companion. She is quick to learn and retention is great. She loves everybody and everybody loves her. She is great with the neighborhood children who look forward to seeing her every day. They enjoy petting and running up and down the fence line with her.

MK: Have you started field work with this dog yet?

JJ: Yes I have, after basic obedience, force-fetching and collar conditioning of course. She enjoys being outdoors whether playing or training. Don't let their size fool you! They are tough little dogs with an insatiable appetite to please. Although they are tough and resilient, training for field or any performance activity must be fun. They get bored with too much repetition and training with a heavy hand may shut them down completely for a while.

MK: Does the breed's original purpose "...to toll and lure..." ducks make training for traditional hunt tests a little against their playful nature?

JJ: Although this is my first Toller and I have limited experience with this breed, I feel that tolling doesn't take away from their playful nature when training for traditional hunt test. Tolling is to entice birds to approach by arousing their curiosity, as by antics of the trained dog. The whole idea as I see it, is that they get to retrieve something whether it's a bird, ball, stick or bumper. She retrieves thrown objects in the house all the time and seems never to get tired. They truly enjoy being with their handlers and pleasing them whenever possible. Kayla has participated in few sanctioned trials locally. Her style and perseverance during these trials were exciting to watch. Watching her on the line with body quivering with excitement and head pointed to the gunner, she just has one thing in mind...“Let me go so I can get that bird!” We are currently training for the Jayhawk Hunt Test on June 1 and 2.

MK: What characteristics do you see in your Toller that are different from your Labrador?

JJ: High Energy, High Energy and more High Energy. Even though these little guys are great family dogs they are no couch potatoes. They must be kept active. Their compact size is another characteristic that I like. As I get older and my joints are starting to talk to me, lifting 34 pounds soak 'n wet as opposed to 70 plus pounds is a no-brainer. Also she is a great watchdog. Kayla is the first dog to alert me that someone is in the area. I think my Labs have left this job solely to her. With my Labs' short dense coat, an occasional bath, regular nail care and maybe a quick brushing was all that I did. Now, with the Toller I had to learn how to groom her properly. Trimming the ears and feet are essential. Also, it is important to brush the dog to remove dirt, seeds and burrs especially after training in the field. Grooming my Toller doesn't take as long now as it did in the beginning. And finally a Toller may elicit a unique screeching sound when seeing familiar visitors or when anticipating their turn in a really fun activity. It's a high pitched sound very much like a baby in distress and quite loud and distracting. So it is important to end this behavior at an early age.

Thanks to Sue and Janice for helping us learn about their breed. The Toller sounds like a fun dog! I am also glad to see another retriever participating in AKC tests. The field people need to remember that not all retrievers are Labradors or Goldens!

Happy training!



Sue Dorscheid's dog, Roy, Can/NSDTRC Ch, UKC GrCH, HRCH, U-UD, Can/NSDTRC WCX, Can CD, NSDTRC CDX (NSDTRC denotes a Toller club title)

