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Chesapeake Bay Retrievers

WHAT IS A CHESAPEAKE?

A Chesapeake is neither a Labrador nor a Golden, with a different coat. He has his own personality and traits. Chessies sometimes have a reputation for being stubborn, hard-headed, and aggressive—but these are all labels the Chesapeake does not deserve, and ones that are given by people who don't understand the breed or how best to train them.

A Chesapeake thrives in a family situation. He may be content outdoors or in a kennel, but he would rather be indoors with the family, sharing all the activities his owners enjoy. He bonds with his owner and will work his heart out for the ones he loves. He does not do as well as Labradors with professional handlers. It takes a professional trainer who understands the breed to succeed with his training. It is difficult to train him with force. Excessive force will make him react with either “flight” (shut down, leave) or “fight” (object with a growl or bite). Hence the labels “stubborn” and “aggressive.” He just wants to understand what you want.

When the dog is trained with force, often he exhibits avoidance responses. If you are going to punish me when I go for a bird, I won't look at the gunners. If you are going to punish me, I will lie down and not go. You can kill



me, but I won't do something that I don't understand. When a Chesapeake “knows” what you want of him, he'll work with enthusiasm.

The Chesapeake is first of all a water dog. He was originally bred to retrieve all day in the icy waters of the Chesapeake Bay. When offered to work or play in water, he exhibits all the joy he can show. His mighty leap into a lake can exceed 20 feet. On occasion it can be difficult to convince him to come out of the water. In hunt tests and field trials, he excels on the water tests.

The Chesapeake is intelligent, learning skills

quickly with praise and positive methods. He is not a Golden Retriever who will accept doing one exercise over and over in obedience. He gets bored with repetition. He can be very creative when faced with having to do multiple fronts and finishes. However, he can be as accurate as any other breed, working with ears up, tail wagging, and pure delight in his eyes.

Working is the key word for a Chesapeake. He needs a job—be it hunting, competing in obedience, tracking a stranger, leaping and weaving in the agility ring, hiking the trails with his owner, or any recreational activity his owner enjoys. He is not a dog for a family that

wants a “couch potato.” Now he will gladly lounge on the sofa, or by the fire, but he has to get his energy worn down and his brain challenged as well.

When thinking of owning a Chessie, ask the key questions that will help with the decision: Why do you want this dog? What activities do you enjoy where you could include him? How much time do you have to spend working with him?

Once you own a Chesapeake Bay Retriever, you own a dog of a lifetime.

—Audrey Austin,
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Curly-Coated Retrievers

As many dog owners today enjoy training after a few setbacks, Jenny Dickinson now shares some thoughtful training ideas with us in the following column.

ADAPTIVE OBEDIENCE TRAINING

Like many older dog people, I look forward to knee replacements in the near future! Meanwhile, I cannot bear to give up obedience training, which is my mental health medicine. We obedience people train for years for those few minutes in the competition ring. The process of training is what we love and

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why we bother to invest scads of time and money getting that brisk retrieve or dramatic go-out.

I recently realized, after hobbling into a lesson, that I experienced a surge of

dopamine when I step onto the training floor with my beloved Curly. The experience of learning triggers the release of that energizing hormone in both dogs and people. Even though my mobility is compromised, I do not want to give that up.

Therefore, I have felt some urgency to

come up with ways that I could continue to train with my partner in my somewhat limited state. I enlisted the help of an excellent obedience coach (and AKC provisional novice judge), Sheila Bennett, to come up with ideas for accomplishing Open and Utility training, even though I cannot walk very well. Sheila's guidance is allowing me to continue with the sport that brings me so much happiness. Of course, my heeling has had to completely stop



Curly-Coated Retriever

because I walk like Frankenstein. However, I do realize that it can be restored after I recover and gain back some range of motion.

Hold to give. The first activity I wanted to work on was the transition from hold to give. My dog, Billy, has a very soft temperament, so I wanted to avoid the force-fetch. Sheila helped me realize that I had created the following problem in the course of informal retriever play at home. Billy loves to run out and get a toy and run back and spit it at me or throw it into

my lap. In my delight that he was retrieving, I had absentmindedly been accepting this. By playing keep-away and tug with the dumbbell, throwing it, and then not picking it up if he spat it out at me, I was able to fix the problem quite easily, because Billy is so delighted to retrieve the dumbbell and he quickly figured out what he needed to do to keep the game alive.

Articles. I also wanted to have a way to work

with articles while sitting in a chair. I was very concerned about fouling up the mechanics of the send. Sheila helped me define just the part of the exercise that the dog does at the pile. (We shall add my "turn to send" later on.

Gloves. The pivots are the most important part of this exercise, and my knees will not let me pivot without possibly falling on my dog, so I am concentrating on the mark with all three gloves set out. I can practice get it, hold, front, give, and finish in my hallway at home.

Signals. One of the first things Billy learned as a baby was to fold back or "Sphinx" down. He offers it as his default behavior all the time. To keep the transition to sit crisp, I continue to work close to him. Fundamentals are never a waste of time. He can develop strong muscle memory for clean signals this way.

Equipment. I have found that the most important piece of equipment for this adaptive training is a rolling stool, such as those physicians typically use in their examining rooms. This allows me to back up from the dog to induce a front or roll out to the article pile, for example. Second, you need a grabber-stick for putting out articles and gloves without falling onto your head!

I was afraid that I might sink into depression when my mobility went downhill. I was afraid that I might have to give up the delights of seeing my dog solve a problem or proudly

show me he had grasped a concept. However, by making some adjustments, I can now look forward to training as I recover from my knee surgeries. I do not have to fear losing all the progress that I have made with my dog, and I can be assured that my goal of eventually getting back into the ring is entirely reasonable!
—J.D.

Jenny, thanks so much for another very informative column. For any who might wish to comment or add further suggestions, you may contact Jenny Dickinson at jenny@inhomedogtraining.net.

—Ann Shinkle,
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Golden Retrievers THE SHINE ON PROJECT

Hemangiosarcoma (HSA) could be called the silent killer. This invasive disease develops as a cancerous tumor that grows deep inside the dog's spleen or liver, causing no pain or outward symptoms. When it is finally diagnosed, the disease has progressed beyond treatment. Owners often are unaware their dog is affected until the tumor ruptures. Their dog dies suddenly for no apparent reason, the cause of death being a fatal bleeding episode from an undiagnosed

CURLY-COATED RETRIEVER COURTESY KATHLEEN RILEY