



· BREED PRIORITIES ·

AIREDALE TERRIERS

BY NIKKI RIGGSBEE

The Airedale Terrier is called the “King of Terriers” and is the largest Terrier breed. Developed in the Aire Valley in northern England, the Airedale claims many other Terrier breeds plus the Otterhound and possibly some sporting breeds in its history. The breed has been used for many jobs, including ratting, hunting, herding, guardian, in military and police work, as well as being a companion and competing in dog sports. It was one of the early breeds recognized by AKC and currently ranks 60th in registration.

We found twenty Airedale breeder-judges to invite to take a survey on their breed’s priorities. Sixteen agreed to participate, and thirteen completed surveys were received. Those who did the survey had been in the breed for more than forty years on average and had been judging the breed for nearly fifteen years on average. More than half have judged their national specialty, and most have judged other Airedale specialties.

This article is not intended to promote fault or part judging. Nor is it to imply that any characteristic called for in the standard is unimportant. Judging, and breeding, is about prioritizing and about what the judge or breeder will forgive. Discussing priorities can help in learning how to better evaluate a breed.

Questions, Comments, or Concerns? Contact AKC Judge Ms. Nikki Riggsbee at this email address: Nriggsbee@aol.com

Airedale Terrier Virtues

The breeder-judges prioritized a set of characteristics taken from their standard from most important to least. The list below is in sequence by the average rankings, with 1 being the most important.

1. Back short, strong, level
2. Shoulders long, sloping well into back
3. Eyes dark, small, not prominent, full of terrier expression
4. Foreface well filled before eyes
5. Movement free
6. Little difference between length of skull and foreface
7. Root of tail set well up on back
8. Hindquarters strong, muscular
9. Chest deep, not broad
10. Neck moderate length
11. Coat hard, dense, wiry
12. Bite level or scissors
13. V-shaped ears, carriage to the side of the head
14. Hocks well let down, parallel with each other
15. Topline of ear above level of skull
16. Small, round feet

Agreement has been measured in these surveys as the number of experts ranking a virtue within a range of four, such as 1 – 4, 2 – 5, 3 – 6, and so on. This group of Airedale breeder-judges had split opinions on many of the items which resulted in smaller and fewer majorities.

The largest majority, almost seventy percent, placed “Small, round feet” (16th) in the bottom quartile, with six putting it last. Eight of the group agreed on “Shoulders long, sloping well into back” (2nd), “Coat hard, dense, wiry” (11th), and “Topline of ear above level of skull” (15th).

The smallest majorities occurred on “Back short, strong, level” (1st), “Eyes dark, small, not prominent, full of terrier expression” (3rd), “Neck moderate length” (10th), “V-shaped ears, carriage to the side of the head” (13th), and “Hocks well let down, parallel with each other” (14th). “Eyes” (3rd) had a split opinion, with the majority in the top quartile, and five around the middle. “Hocks” (14th) was also split, with seven in the third quartile and six in the last quartile.

Six virtues managed agreement from six experts: “Foreface well filled before eyes” (4th), “Movement free” (5th), “Little difference between length of skull and foreface” (6th), “Root of tail set well up on back” (7th), “Chest deep, not broad” (9th), and “Bite level or scissors” (12th). Again, there were split opinions. “Foreface filled” (4th) was 2 – 5 for six and in the third quartile for five. “Skull = foreface” (6th) was 3 – 6 on six surveys and in the last quartile on four. Six ranked “Bite” (12th) 14 – 16, but four others thought it important. “Movement” (5th) split three ways. Six had it in the top quartile, four around the middle, and three in the last quartile.

“Hindquarters strong, muscular” (8th) also had a three-way split. Five placed it around the middle. Another five ranked it 3 – 6. And three were 12th or 13th.

Because there was less agreement overall, some of the average ranks were close. “Shoulders” (2nd) and “Eyes” (3rd) were less than one-tenth of a point apart. “Chest deep” (9th) and “Neck moderate length” (10th) were nearly as close. Additional surveys could change the rank order of the characteristics, especially on those with less agreement.

Airedale Terrier Faults

The survey also included a list of faults taken directly or derived from the breed standard for the experts to prioritize. The list of faults inadvertently got sent with only fifteen items instead of sixteen that this list usually contains. Since it had already been distributed, we just left it at fifteen. Below is the list in sequence by the average rankings, with 1 being the most serious.

1. Poor movement
2. Back not short or level
3. Yellow eyes
4. Skull broad between ears
5. Soft coat
6. Obvious difference between length of skull and foreface
7. Undershot

8. Hound ears
9. Hindquarters droop
10. Much over or under size limit
11. Hind legs moving too close or too far apart
12. Broad chest
13. Toes turn in or out
14. Ears pointing to eyes
15. Tail curled over back

The greatest agreement, ten of the thirteen, was on “Poor movement” (1st) and “Tail curled over back” (15th). Eight of the group concurred on “Back not short or level” (2nd), “Hindquarters droop” (9th), and “Broad chest” (12th).

Three faults garnered the smallest majorities: “Yellow eyes” (3rd), “Toes turn in or out” (13th), and “Ears pointing to eyes” (14th). “Ears” (14th) were in the bottom quartile for seven, but another five had it midpoint or slightly lower.

Several faults had half agreeing, often the result of split opinions as with the virtues. “Skull broad” (4th), “Soft coat” (5th), “Muzzle not equal skull” (6th), “Undershot” (7th), “Hound ears” (8th), and “Hind legs moving too close or too far apart” (11th). “Skull broad” (4th) was in the top quartile for six, and in the third quartile on four. Six had “Soft coat” (4th) important, but five had it around the middle. “Skull/muzzle” (6th) was in the third quartile for six experts, but much more important for five. “Undershot” (7th) was quite important for half, with the rest scattered mostly below midpoint. Half had “Hound ears” (8th) between 3 and 6 with another six around the middle.

“Much over or under size limit” (10th) had the biggest difference of opinions. Five put it in the top quartile. Another five put it in the bottom quartile.

“Poor movement” (1st) was nearly one-and-one-half points above the second ranked fault, confirming it as the most serious fault. “Tail curled over back” (15th) was similarly separated from its adjacent fault.

There was some consistency between both lists. “Short/level back” was first as a virtue and second as a fault. “Eyes” were third and “Skull and foreface length” was sixth on both lists. “Hindquarters” were 8th as a virtue, 9th as a fault. “Ears” 15th on one and 14th on the other.

“Movement” was fifth as a virtue, but first as a fault, and “Coat” 11th as a virtue, but fifth as a fault. “Bite” was 12th on the first list, and 7th on the second list. Some features are more important when they are problems. When they are acceptable, then other characteristics may contribute more to breed definition. Temperament is often prioritized this way.

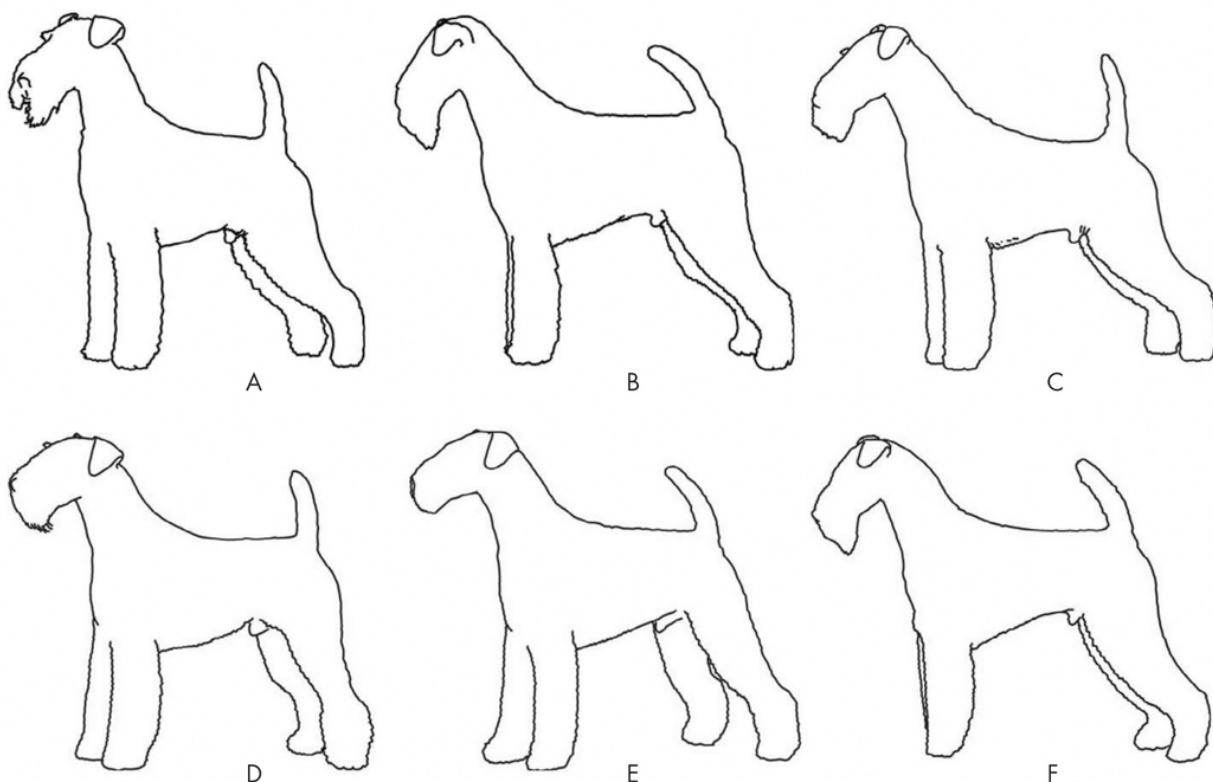
Defining Characteristics

The breeder-judges were asked to name four to six characteristics that they felt define the Airedale Terrier and must be given priority when evaluating the breed. The head was mentioned most often, followed by expression. Next frequently mentioned were character and temperament, movement, and balance. Topline and high tailset were also often listed.

Airedale Terrier Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

DOGS



Outlines

The experts evaluated two sets of Airedale Terrier outlines, six dogs and six bitches, placing each set first through fourth as they would a dog show class. The outlines were made from photographs of real dogs, so they aren't in exactly the same positions. While we try to use only photos of very good dogs, none is ideal. Understand that the placements were made on outline only and might indeed change if the judges could see the dogs in person, could see head details, get their hands on the dogs, and see them move.

The breeder-judges were in great agreement with the Airedale dog outlines. All but two placed Airedale "A" first. Those who chose him said "flat backskull, short coupled," "best balance, up on leg, nice head, ears, tailset," "best overall breed features," "good outline," "good stations," and "short, strong, level back, and well-sprung ribs."

Second place dog based on average placement score was "C," who was placed second by seventy percent of the group. Those who liked him said "strength of rear and tail set,"

"fancier," "square, balanced, long headed (brick shaped), great fit neck to shoulder," "good balance, dog behind the tail," and "overall good."

The selections in bitches were not as decided. First place bitch was Airedale "Y," with the best bitch average and the most bitch first placements. Those who favored her commented "best," "overall balance, topline, short coupled, tailset," "good balance," "good topline, ears appear good," "good head length, dog behind tail for a bitch," "pretty headed," and "head planes and general outline."

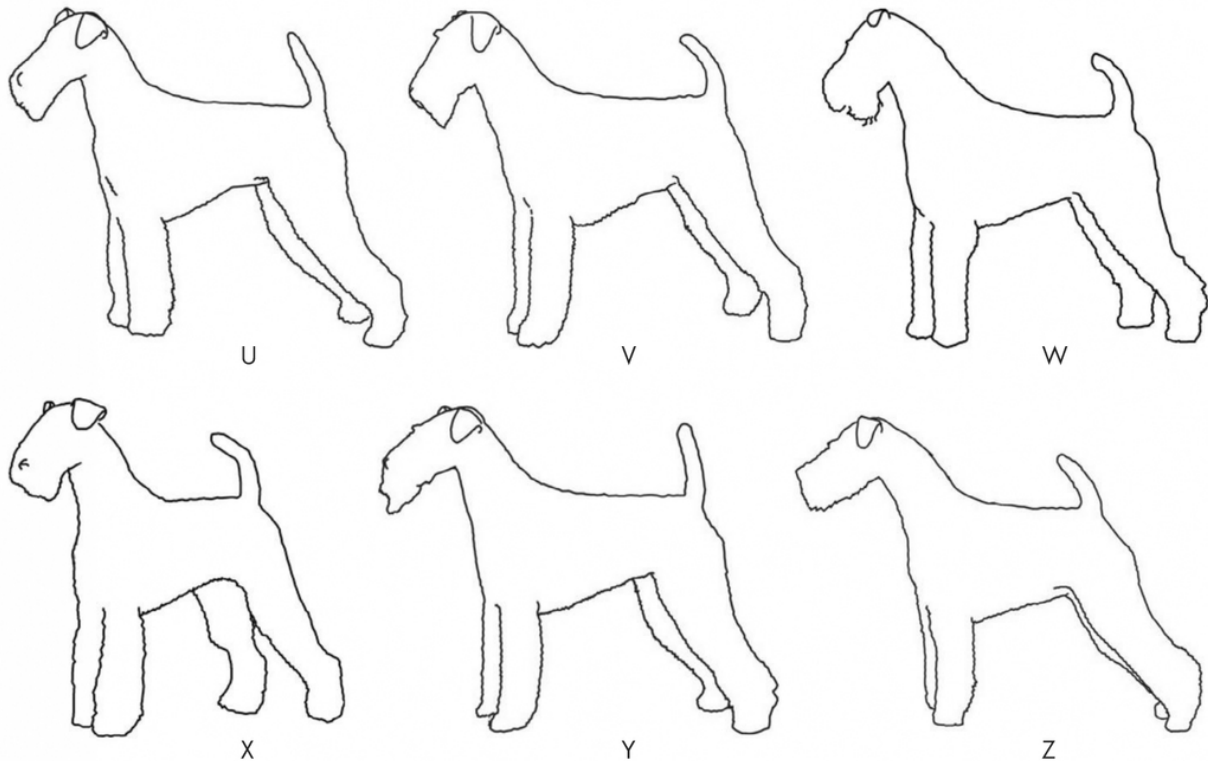
Second place bitch was Airedale "U." Comments on her included "has the qualities comprising a good bitch," "balance, pretty head and ears, well let down hocks, strong topline, good tail set," and "best of a bad group." The survey with the last comment also said that the dogs (outlines) as a group were better than the bitches. Some classes are like that, just like real dog shows.

Best of Breed was clearly Airedale Terrier "A," who had the best average placement, most first placements, and was awarded BOB by ten of the thirteen experts.

Airedale Terrier Outlines

Pick Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex

BITCHES



Dogs "C" and "F" were the only dogs placed first by any breeder-judge besides dog "A." Bitches "U" and "X" in addition to "Y" were the only bitches ranked first on any survey.

Dogs "A" and "C" and bitches "U" and "X" were never left out of the ribbons. Dog "D" was the dog most often not placed followed by dog "E." Airedale "W" was unplaced most often among the bitches, followed by bitch "Z."

Additional Notes

The Airedale Terrier breeder-judges added some comments on their surveys for students of their breed.

- Nothing [in the survey] referenced having muscle or being muscular. Muscle is mentioned six times in the standard, which I consider very important. Color, also, was not addressed.
- I don't want my Airedales too big, which I see more of these days.
- He should stand his ground when facing another Airedale.
- No spooks!

- Head must be brick-shaped, no suggestion of sad, houndy, or softness in expression.
- Important is good wire coat with proper presentation for a terrier (hand stripped, no scissoring, no backcoat dye).
- This is a working and hunting dog and must have terrier attitude to fulfill its purpose.
- I want to see proper length and texture on coats.
- Movement is the true test of conformation
- I love everything about them, especially their temperament and intelligence

Thanks to the Airedale breeder-judges for sharing their expertise.