

Dog Fancy Breed Profile Welsh Terrier

Welsh Terrier in Brief

Country of origin: Wales.

Group: Terrier.

Life span: 14 to 17 years.

Color: Tan with a black "jacket" — a solid area of color that spreads up onto the neck, down onto the tail, and onto the upper thighs.

Coat: Hard, wiry, dense overcoat with short, soft undercoat.

Grooming: Brush weekly. Hand-strip frequently, or clip every three months. Bathe only occasionally.

Height/weight: 15 inches; 20 pounds.

Trainability: Medium.

Activity level: High.

Known health problems: Epilepsy, glaucoma, allergic skin conditions, and thyroid abnormalities.

Best home: With an active individual, couple, or family with older children and a fenced yard.

Good with children: Yes, with older children.

Good with other pets: Not known for its chumminess with other animals. Cats can trigger its hunting instinct.

National breed club: Welsh Terrier Club of America <http://clubs.akc.org/wtca>

Rescue: Welsh Terrier Club of America/WTCARES <http://www.wtcares.org/>

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Welsh Terrier: The spirit of Wales

The Welsh Terrier loves the hunt and home

Terry Winkelmann

The ducks passing over Tony Gaughan's yard in Nicholasville, Ky., were flying low. Too low. "Maggie shot out and grabbed one in midair," recalls Gaughan, president of the Welsh Terrier Club of America, of his then 6-year-old dog. The bird didn't belong in her airspace, so she addressed the situation in a typical Welshie way: "She grabbed it by the rear. It was honking and flapping and there were feathers everywhere."

Snakes, possum, chipmunks — whatever scurries or flies qualifies as a target for the alert Welsh Terrier. The dog's original purpose was to rid farms of rats, mice, badgers, fox, and even otter. "Their instinct says if it looks like a varmint — do something!" Gaughan says.

Cat owners, beware: Felines can also trigger this breed's hunting instinct. Camden, Tenn., resident Lyn Hollis, chair of WTCARES, the rescue arm of the national breed club, has seen her share of predatory behavior. She once left her Welsh Terrier family alone with a parrot they'd known since birth. "I'm sure someone rang the doorbell, the parrot got to squawking, and the dogs knocked the cage over and killed it," she surmises.

Sturdy, alert, tough, and fearless, the Welsh Terrier reserves his antipathy for small creatures. "They're wonderful with people," Hollis says. Far from being one-person dogs, Welsh Terriers bond with the whole family and, despite an initial flurry of barking, everyone who comes to the door.

If those newcomers mistake the dog for a small Airedale, it's understandable. "The Welsh is the basis of the Airedale," explains Newtown, Conn.-based Bardi McClennan, author of three books on the Welsh Terrier. "Farmers wanted a terrier-like dog that could swim, so they crossed a Welsh with an Otterhound to create the Airedale."

While breeders agree that males are "more likely to sit in your lap," both genders eagerly express affection. "They want to be with you — in the car, on a walk. They're great companions," Gaughan enthuses. "Their personality is so engaging." Teaching them house rules can be work, but "it's very rewarding work," he says.

"You just have to understand the terrier mind and keep training fun and new," Hollis says. "They've very quick learners." At age six, Hollis' Elizabeth suddenly taught herself to open the refrigerator. "I found her eating a pack of hot dogs one day and assumed I'd left the door ajar," she says. "The next day, she had the gang out in the hall sharing a pound of butter." Lucy Bailey, a St. Louis breeder for 20 years and a trainer for 30, teaches her dogs to jump hoops, sit on a stool, spin, roll over, and catch. Her 10-year-old, Moose, stays active in earth dog trials, obedience, and agility — a real achievement

given the breed's independent streak.

A Welsh Terrier works best in homes with older children. The breed won't often tolerate the kind of rough play that some others patiently endure. And don't expect them to cozy up to other dogs. "They're competitive. You have to watch them all the time," Gaughan says.

However, McClennan takes a different view. "A well-bred Welsh should not be argumentative," says the former breeder. Having just returned from a trip to Wales, she recalled seeing six dogs running loose and playing together peaceably. Welsh Terriers are "full of spunk and will hunt at the drop of a hat," she says, "but they are very good with kids and fun to live with."

Most agree that the Welsh Terrier is not a dog to cuddle and baby. "They'll take advantage of that and can become destructive and annoying," Bailey warns. Owners must set clear boundaries but avoid force. "Welsh were bred to win any confrontation," she explains. "Be the leader you yourself would want to have, and you'll have a dog you can love for a long time."

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