

## **Context and History**

Six years ago, I started doing what in this document is called the Airedale Hunting Instinct Test (AHIT) as part of the Annual Airedale Versatility Day sponsored by the Lone Star Airedale Terrier Club. It is an effort to interest the general population of Airedale owners; the person that may be a spectator or someone that is locked into metropolitan life and never gets the satisfaction of seeing his dog in the field; it shows that person the fun Airedales will have if given an opportunity to work in the field. The person may not be a club member and the AHIT gives that person one more reason to join the club.

At first I was pleasantly surprised at the interest generated by the AHIT, thinking this would be a one time thing. However the interest has been maintained over the years and is now one of the most popular draws at LSATC's Annual Versatility Day. A number of ATCA board members have attended and can testify to the interest generated by this event: Martha Graham, April Clyde, and Jean Surfus to name a few.

Generally, the AHIT has not been a stand alone event; it has been used at the beginning of a Club meeting, an Airedale Picnic, an Airedale Fun Day, an Airedale Versatility Day or similar event as an added promotion. Priced correctly, the club can make some money off the birds and gives another reason for people to attend.

As an added bonus, the AHIT is an easy way to get young people involved. It also is a way to see what work is needed for both the handler and dog if they choose to get more involved in field work. Frequently the younger dogs - under one year old - surprise their owner by their aptitude and enthusiasm.

The AHIT outline is as simple as possible by design and is intended to be over seen or put on by an ATCA Hunting and Field Committee member who is familiar with what is practiced in hunting or in a hunt test.

This is not intended to be a rigid test. In fact it is intended to be as relaxed and loose as possible with minimum pressure on handler and dog. Just getting a first timer in the field with his Airedale can be considered a success and accomplishes what the AHIT was designed to do. We add the possibility of a certificate to up the ante – and hope to get new club members and more word of mouth advertising for Airedales.

This relaxed, fun approach has proven to appeal to the first timer, young and old. At the conclusion of a recent AHIT in Texas, a spectator approached the owner of an Airedale who had just worked the field and asked if that bitch could be purchased; to no avail. Advertising – the hunting instinct of the Airedale

Kenneth Cook

## **Airedale Hunting Instinct Test**

### **PURPOSE:**

The goal of the AHIT is to entice Airedale owners into the field with their Airedales. It is designed for the complete novice – both dog and handler. The test is of the dogs prey and retrieve drive and not of prior training. The purpose is for both dog and handler to have fun, and for the handler to see the dog's natural hunting instincts.

### **AHIT LEADER:**

The AHIT may be conducted by a member of the ATCA Hunting and Field Committee or someone who is familiar with the AKC Flushing Spaniel Hunting Tests or with actual upland bird hunting. The AHIT Leader for each specific event will be approved by the ATCA Hunting and Field Committee. The AHIT Leader has the actual hands on responsibility to run the AHIT event and to determine if each Airedale earns a certificate. The AHIT Leader completes the Control Sheet and mails it to the AHIT Coordinator.

**SPONSOR:** AHIT may be sponsored by a Regional Airedale Club or by a group of interested Airedale enthusiasts. The sponsoring group is responsible for all associated expenses. The group wishing to sponsor the event should contact the AHIT coordinator, preferably 90 days in advance, with the name of the sponsoring group, the date and proposed location for the event. It is recommended that the AHIT not be a stand alone event, but rather an add-on to an event such as an Airedale Versatility day, an Airedale Fun Day, an Airedale Picnic, a Club meeting or similar event.

The Sponsoring organization should appoint one individual to assist the AHIT leader in pre-event planning and day-of implementation. It is hoped that this individual could become familiar with the AHIT and be prepared to be an AHIT leader for subsequent events.

**AHIT COORDINATOR:** The coordinator is appointed by the ATCA Hunting and Field Committee. His task is to work with the sponsoring group to find a suitable Test Leader, to advise the sponsor of desired field conditions and how to obtain birds. Although it is the sponsor's responsibility to handle all the practical issues involved in running a successful test, the coordinator will be available to answer questions and give advice.

**EVENT DETAILS:** The AHIT awards certificates; these are **NOT ATCA TITLES**. The AHIT Leader will record the results of the tests on the AHIT Control Sheet and mail it to the AHIT Coordinator within 7 days of completing the test. The AHIT Coordinator will mail certificates to qualifying Airedales within 14 days of receiving the Control Sheets from the AHIT Leader.

**AHIT OUTLINE** For the day of the test:

1. Place reserve birds downwind from the flushing field

- The AHIT Leader should arrive at the site early to make sure the birds are located in a convenient place, but not where they will distract the dog in the field.
- The person assigned by the sponsoring group to assist with the AHIT can function as a “starter/marshal” so the next dog/handler team is ready and any observers are not blocking the field.

2. Explain to handlers (and anyone else) what is required – ask for questions

- This is to be fun for the dog. There is no pressure to perform, it is a test of prey and retrieve drive, not training.
- First we will introduce the dog to birds and give him permission to catch and retrieve
- Next we will give the dog an opportunity to find, catch and retrieve a bird. Handler’s job is to allow the dog to hunt on a loose lead. When/if he catches the bird, encourage him to bring the bird to you using the long lead.
- We will award an ATCA Hunting Instinct Certificate if your dog:
  - Shows interest in the birds
  - Uses his nose to locate the bird
  - Catches the bird
  - Retrieves to within about three feet of you with no more than three tugs on the long lead
  - Does not badly chew or eat the bird

If he does not catch on, we will encourage you to try again. Either way we want both handler and Airedale to have fun.

3. Put dog on 50 foot lead with a flat collar

4. Introduce clip wing bird to dog to interest and excite him and to show him what he will be looking for. Explain the importance of the wind to the handler.

5. Plant bird 60+ feet from the handler

6. Start handler circling to get his dog downwind of bird 60+ feet

7. Upon reaching 60+ feet and down wind, send dog on very loose lead to flush the bird

8. Let the dog hunt with a loose lead

9. With a successful flush and catch, the handler calls the dog to retrieve the bird – do not go to the dog- if there is no other way possible, use the lead to encourage the dog to retrieve to you – with a short tug on the lead. (3 tugs max).

10. Bird should not be chewed up (no big body rips) and can be used as a training tool for the life of the bird; usually three or four times.

11. Dog should show scenting ability and should retrieve to within 3 feet of the handler with no more than three tugs on a loose lead.

Date of Test \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring Organization \_\_\_\_\_

AHIT Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Dogs Call Name	Dogs Full Name	Owners Name	Mailing Address for Certificate	Certificate Yes/No