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Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever



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The Thinker

The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever is willful, alert and intelligent.

BY KIM CAMPBELL THORNTON

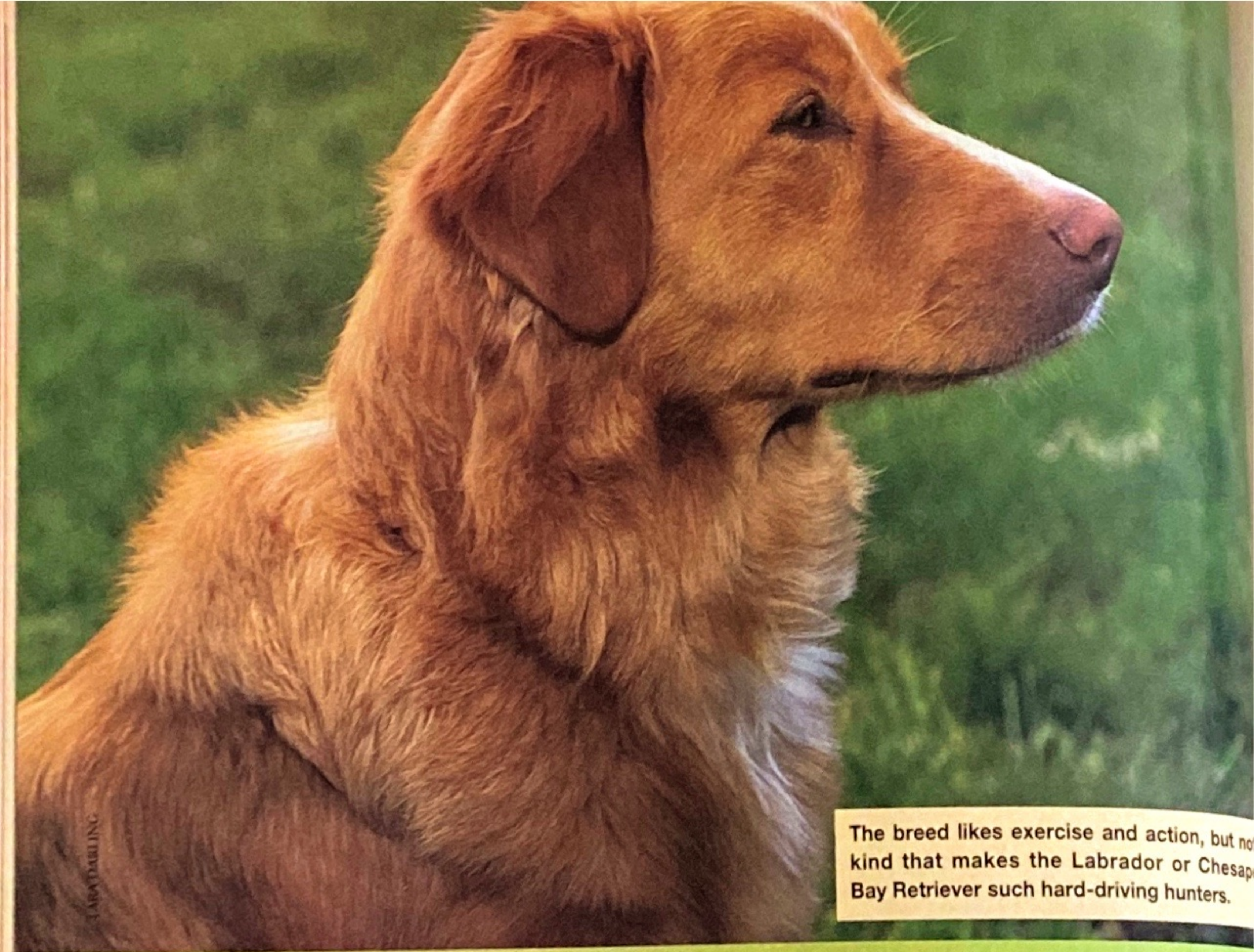


The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever is a happy and hardy breed. Ch. Lonetree G's Parklake Sailor is owned by Jack and Peggy Park of Muncie, Indiana. The pup, Gryffin, is owned by Lorraine Frendling of South Holland, Illinois.



FOX CAME FIRST. HE DANCED ON the shores of the rivers and lakes. When curious ducks came too close, snap went his jaws. Duck was dinner. Canada's Micmac Indians admired Fox's cleverness. They taught their dogs to dance like Fox. Soon, they too could lure the inquisitive ducks.

As the years passed, hunters in England and Canada began to develop dogs that would go into the water and bring back downed birds. They called these dogs retrievers, many bearing the names of the places where they were developed, such as Labrador and Chesapeake Bay. But the hunters in Yarmouth County in southwest Nova Scotia's Little River district went one step further. They created a dog that would attract birds as well as retrieve them. Starting with the Micmac Indian dog, they mixed a little of this and a little of that, skillfully blending Golden and Labrador Retrievers, Chesapeake and Flat-Coated Retrievers, a little Cocker Spaniel or Irish Setter here, maybe some farm Collie there. When they were finished, they had a small, enticing redhead with boundless energy and animation. They called it the Little River Duck Dog. →



The breed likes exercise and action, but not the kind that makes the Labrador or Chesapeake Bay Retriever such hard-driving hunters.

THE NOVA SCOTIA DUCK TOLLING RETRIEVER IN BRIEF

Country of origin	Canada
Function	Retriever
Life span	10 to 14 years
Watchdog	Yes
Color	Various shades of red or orange, usually with at least one of the following white markings—tip of tail, feet, chest or blaze
Coat type	Medium-length water-repellent double coat
Grooming	Weekly brushing; regular nail trimming and ear cleaning; bathing as needed
Height/Weight	Males, 19 to 20 inches, 45 to 51 pounds; females, 18 to 19 inches, 37 to 43 pounds
Disqualifications	White on shoulders, around ears, on back of neck, across back of flanks; any color other than red or orange shades; lack of webbing; undershot bite or wry (bent) mouth; overshot by more than 1/4 inch; shyness in adults; butterfly nose
Activity level	Moderate
Intelligence	High
Trainability	High
Good with children	Yes
Good with other pets	Yes
Home environment	Adaptable to most situations with plenty of exercise
Attitude toward strangers	Reserved
Character	Happy, alert and outgoing
Club	Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club (USA), Sue Van Sloun, P.O. Box 116, Westport Point, MA 02791; (508) 636-5386.

For more than 100 years, the Little River Duck Dog was known only in the province where it was developed. But in 1945, the Canadian Kennel Club gave the breed recognition as well as a new name: Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever. The word *Toller* comes from the Middle English word *tollen*, meaning to entice. Europeans had used tolling dogs for many years, but the Nova Scotia dog combined the talents of tolling and retrieving.

Today, there are about 500 Tollers in the United States, concentrated in the Northeast. Their owners say the dogs are addictive, and indeed, this sporting breed has a lot going for it: personality, size, versatility and an easy-care coat. But like any dog, Tollers are not for everyone. They are smart, independent and active. Their size makes them suitable for condo or apartment living, but only in the company of a smart, active owner who can meet this dog's needs for exercise, entertainment and consistent, patient training.

The Toller likes action, but it's not the kind of hard-driving, all-season hunter that a Labrador or Chesapeake is. Best suited to a weekend hunter or an active family, the Toller is also finding a niche in such sports as agility, flyball and Frisbee. "Tollers are going to become the agility dog; I can feel it in my bones," says Evelyn Williams of Ann Arbor, Michigan, the incoming president of the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club of America. "They are almost as intense as a Border Collie but not as wired." Williams owns six Tollers and has worked with them in obedience, flyball, agility and therapy.

Marile Waterstraat, the club's outgoing president, also praises the Toller's ability in agility. "They seem to really like the activity and thought that goes into doing agility, and they're fast," she says. The dogs are good in obedience trials as long as you're not trying for high-in-trial all the time, Waterstraat says. "It's hard to place at the top with a Toller."

These dogs have minds of their own. As with most sporting breeds, they take well to training, but Waterstraat describes their temperament as complex. Like an actor learning a role, this dog wants to know, "What's my motivation?" "They are intelligent dogs, thinking dogs," says Waterstraat. "They want to do things their way. They think they know better ways, your way isn't necessarily what turns them on today." Her advice for training includes setting firm rules, maintaining consistency and not letting the dog get bored. "If something is fun, they can do it for a long time," she says. Positive reinforcement is the key to success. "If you become harsh, you're cooking your own goose. You can't get into a contest of wills with a Toller, because it will win."

When you're teaching something

new, the dog needs to be successful, Williams says. Tollers don't handle a lot of pressure well; you have to give them a break from it, more than you would with a Lab." But when the motivation is there, the Toller learns quickly and easily.

For these reasons, a Toller does best in a home with a family willing to spend time with it and able to spend the time training and exercising it regularly. In this environment, a Toller can excel as a pet, whether it lives in a New York City highrise or a back-of-beyond farm. When Waterstraat acquired her first two Tollers, she and her husband lived in a condominium. "We walked them every night and every morning," she says. "We know of one Toller that lives in an apartment, and she's paper-trained to the balcony. We have Tollers in New York City; one goes to a play group in Central Park and pulls the family's kid on his skateboard. They're not sedentary, but they're not high-

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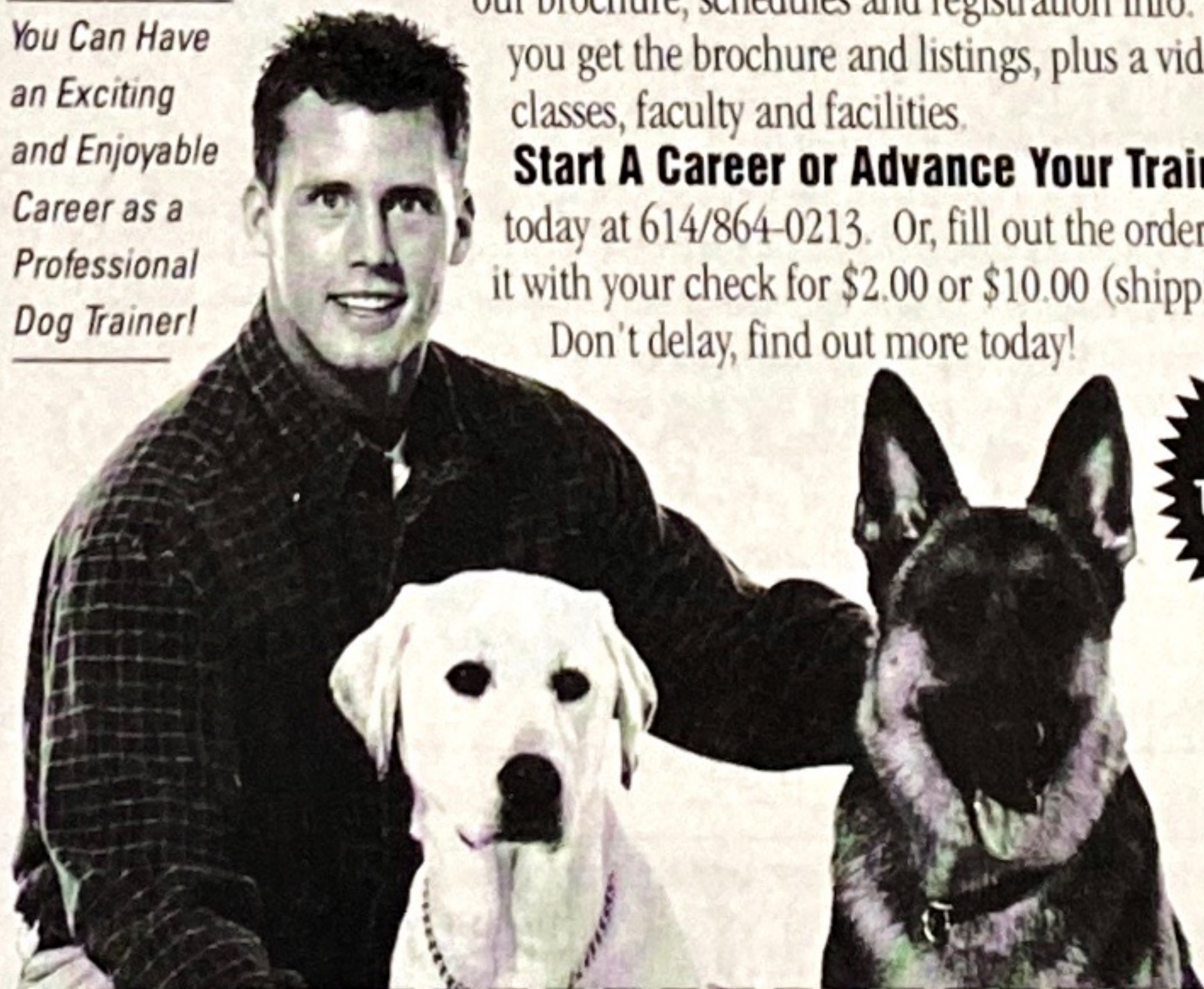
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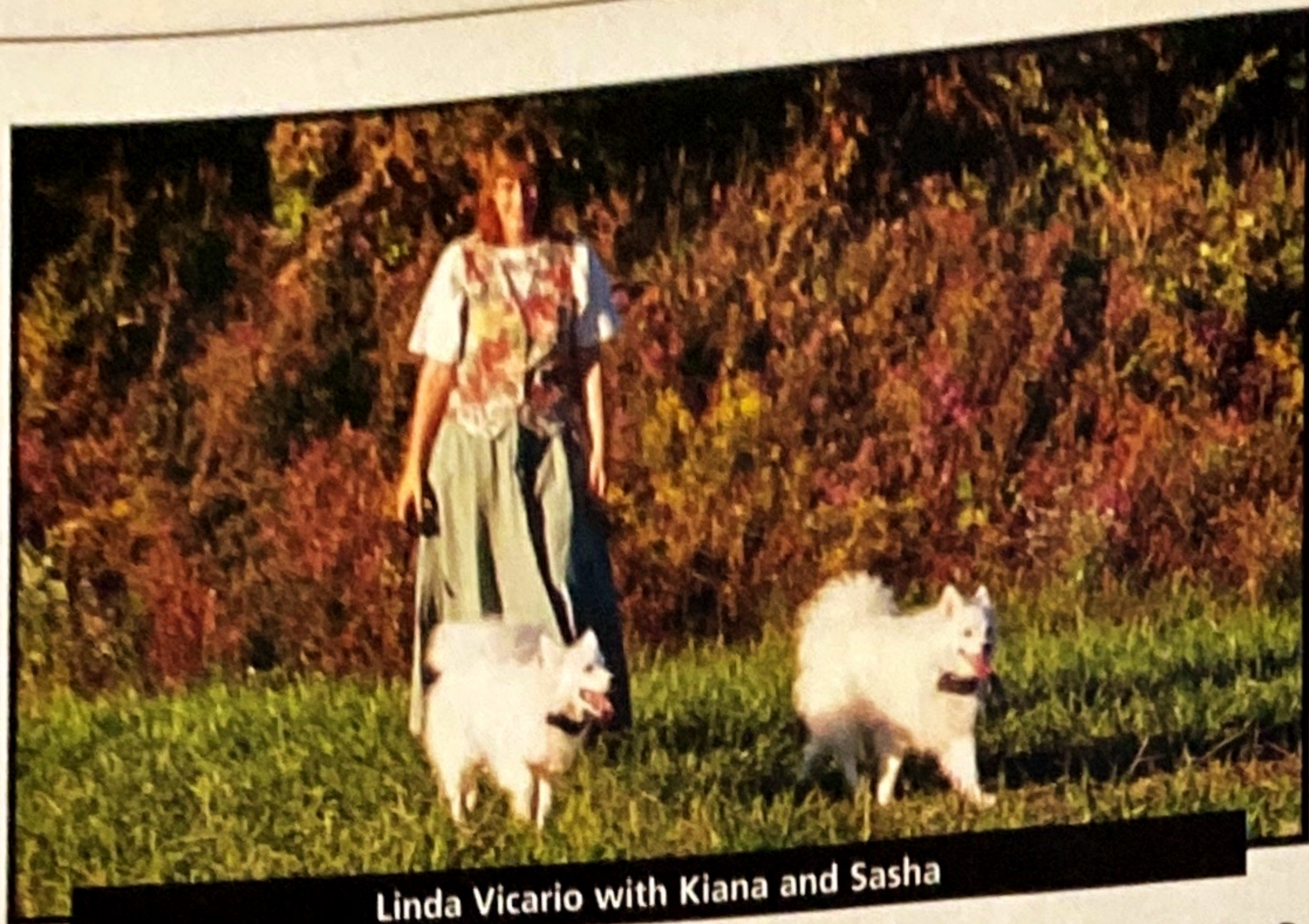


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Linda Vicario with Kiana and Sasha

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exercise dogs. Moderate, I would say.” Moderate is a good word to use describing the Toller. The breed is moderately sized, males standing 19 to 20 inches at the shoulder and weighing 45 to 51 pounds, and females standing 18 to 19 inches, weighing 37 to 43 pounds.

Waterstraat describes the Toller as a wash-and-wear dog. Their medium length, water-repellent double coat is easy to maintain, requiring only weekly brushing throughout most of the year to keep the fur from matting and to remove dead hair. During the spring and fall shedding seasons, daily brushing may be necessary. As with most dogs, there is a certain amount of shedding all year long, although neutered animals have only one major shed. Otherwise, simply keep the nails trimmed, clean and trim the foot pads and pluck around the ears if they are particularly hairy.

Appearance and Health

The Toller’s red or orange coat gives it a foxlike appearance, even giving rise to the supposition that the Toller is the result of a fox-retriever cross, which is genetically impossible. Sometimes, the dog has white markings on its feet (not extending beyond the pasterns), chest, face or tail tip. A white tail tip is especially desirable, because it allows the hunter to keep tabs on the dog from a distance. Nose, lips and eye rims are black or flesh-colored, blending with the coat.

Like most breeds, the Toller has some hereditary health problems potential buyers should be aware of. Reputable breeders screen for progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) and hip dysplasia. Williams says buyers should ask if both pup’s parents have been certified free of eye disease and have had their hips evaluated by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). Because PRA and hip dysplasia are late-onset conditions, screening is not done until the dogs are 2 years old. Because of its coloring—a red coat and a self-colored nose—the Toller may also have a higher incidence of immune-mediated disease, Waterstraat says, although it is no higher than any other breed with similar coloring. It has a lifespan of 10 to 14 years, with at least one Toller having lived to be 16 years old.

Waterstraat says Tollers are born yipping and running around. During a pup’s first year, it is highly active, sometimes getting on the nerves of



Tollers make wonderful companions, but they aren't for everyone. Research the breed carefully before committing yourself to purchasing one.

reserve flies out the window when they meet another Toller person. They know their own kind. "If you smell like a Toller or have a red dog attached to you, they'll like you," Waterstraat says.

The Toller is a good choice for families with school-age children. "My guys love kids," Waterstraat says. "When they get a chance to be with kids, they're out of their minds."

The Toller personality is somewhere between a Golden Retriever and a terrier, Williams says. Individual dogs may

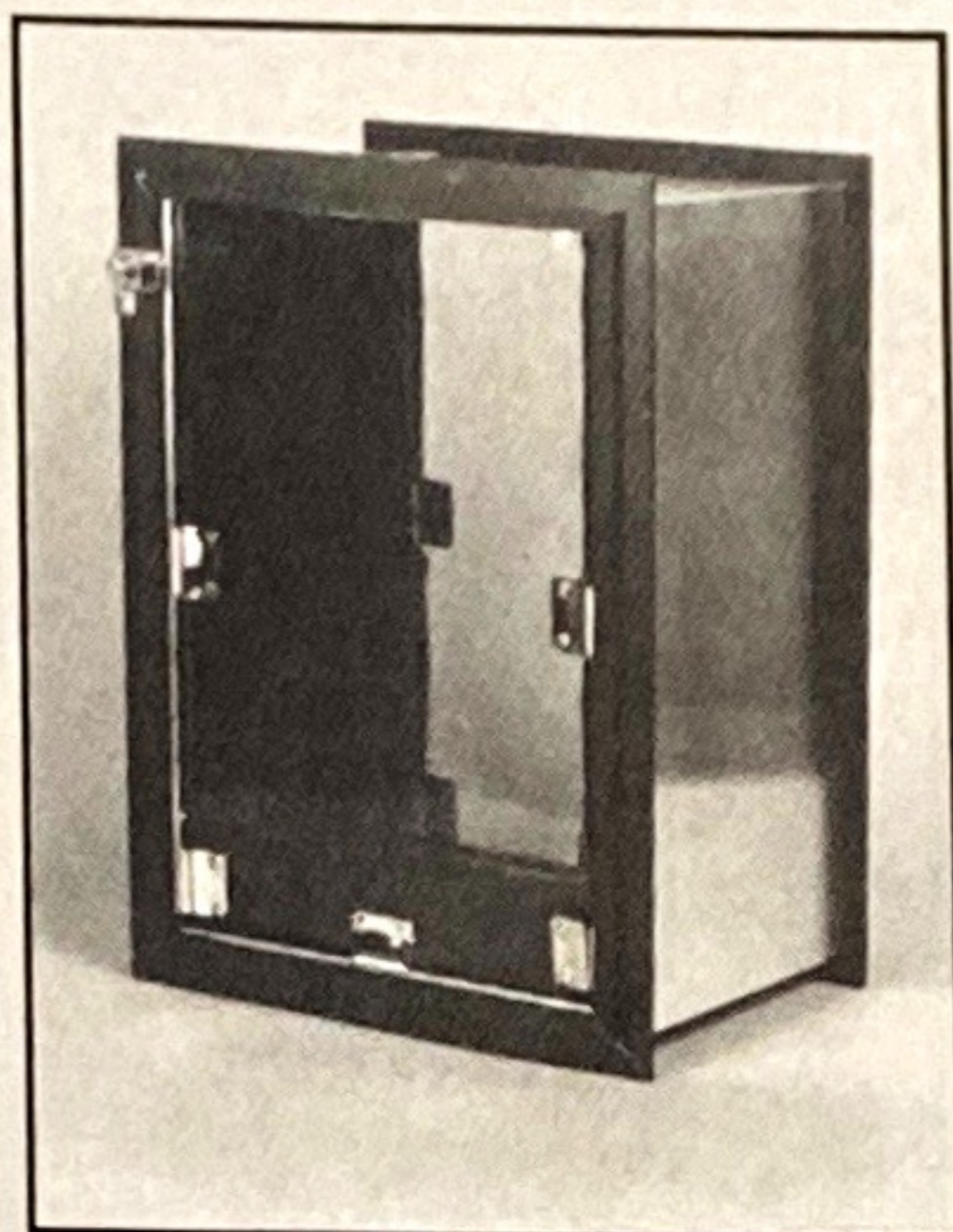
other adult dogs. This high activity level, even though it tapers off as a pup matures, makes the Toller a challenge to live with, but for some people that's part of the breed's appeal. The Toller likes to go for walks, retrieve, do anything with its family. This breed's attitude is one of its best qualities, Williams says.

Its sporting heritage gives the Toller alertness, making for a good watchdog. This breed takes in everything that's going on and learns a great deal by watching rather than being taught, Waterstraat says. Watchfulness applies to strangers in the home as well. "They look to you for the clue," Waterstraat says. "If you're giving them a negative clue, they're going to be negative. If you're open and friendly, they're going to be the same way." On their own, however, most Tollers are reserved. But



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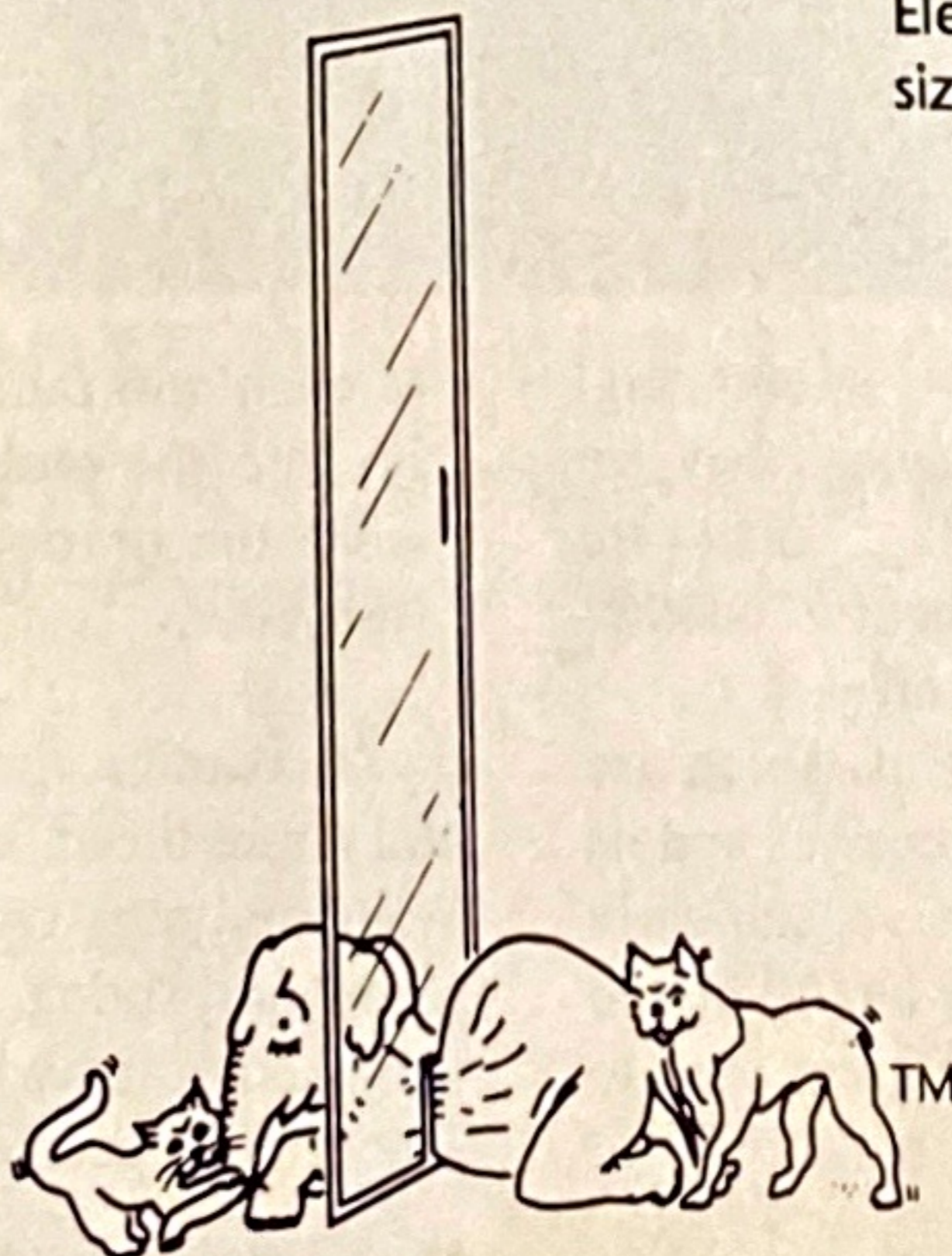
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have a sense of humor, and generally Tollers have an outgoing, upbeat attitude. When they're not working or playing, they are content to lie down and be quiet, a virtue in any dog. Tollers are adaptable, too, seeming to go from one environment to another with ease and being tolerant of crate training and travel.

The Toller has negative traits as well, most of which are related to the type of socialization and training it receives and its environment. The breed can sometimes be aggressive, and early socialization is necessary, Williams says. A Toller left all day to its own devices may get into trouble. It's not a good idea to leave a Toller in the house alone because it may bark, dig and chew, Waterstraat says.

If you decide this challenging breed is right for your family,

English and Canadian hunters developed dogs that would go into the water and bring back downed birds. These were the predecessors of the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever.

don't count on running right out and getting one. The Toller is still a rare breed, so expect a wait of at least a year for a puppy. Williams' next two litters are already sold, and they won't be ready until spring. Use the waiting time to research breeders and learn more about the Toller. And heed Waterstraat's warning: They're like peanuts; you can't have just one. 🐾

Kim Campbell Thornton is a Southern California-based freelance writer and contributing editor to DOG FANCY.