

Home Grown Retriever

By John Mitchell

The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever traces its origins to the Little River area, Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia. Known under various names, such as the Little River Duck Dog or the Yarmouth Toller, it became the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever when the Canadian Kennel Club officially recognized the breed in 1945.

The Toller, as it is more commonly known, has gained a foothold throughout Scandinavia, the Netherlands, England, Central Europe and is in Australia. Certainly the Toller is in the US, but not yet recognized by the American Kennel Club. American Toller breeders do not want breed recognition. They fear, they will lose control of their breed if they do.

A tolling dog runs, jumps, and plays along the shoreline in full view of a flock of ducks, occasionally disappearing from sight and then



quickly reappearing, aided by the hidden hunter, who throws small sticks or a ball for the dog to retrieve. Somehow the action of the dog attracts the ducks who are compelled to investigate. Once within gun range the hunter steadies the dog, flushes the ducks, shoots and what comes down the Toller retrieves. Geese are

attracted the same way and the breed has been known to lure flocks of ducks right out of the sky into a field.

People wonder about the Toller's history. For the most part it is anecdotal. There is no written record. And, even if there were a written record, few of the breeds supposedly behind the makeup of the Toller look today as they did over a hundred years ago.

The Toller was bred to retrieve from icy waters and can be used late in the season. It must have a water repellent coat. It is highly intelligent, easy to train, and has great endurance for a dog of its size. A strong able swimmer, it is a natural and tenacious retriever on land and from water. Its strong retrieving desire and playfulness are qualities essential to its tolling ability.

A mature Toller male weighs in at about fifty pounds and stands about twenty inches at the shoulder. Females are slightly smaller. Temperamentally there is very little difference between the male and female. That applies to trainability as well. In general, female retrievers train easier and are more biddable than males. That is not the case with the Toller. Nor are the males driven to mount and try to breed everything they see, nor do they wander.

The ideal Toller is a couch potato in the house and a dedicated working dog once it is given the opportunity. But don't fool yourself into thinking if I get a Toller I don't have to train it 'cause it will do everything on its own. It won't. They must be trained the same as any other retriever. The advantage is in the Tollers' size. It can do the same work as the other retriever breeds only it comes in a smaller package. One swipe of its tail and your Lab has cleaned off the coffee table. Look under the coffee table if you want to find your Toller.

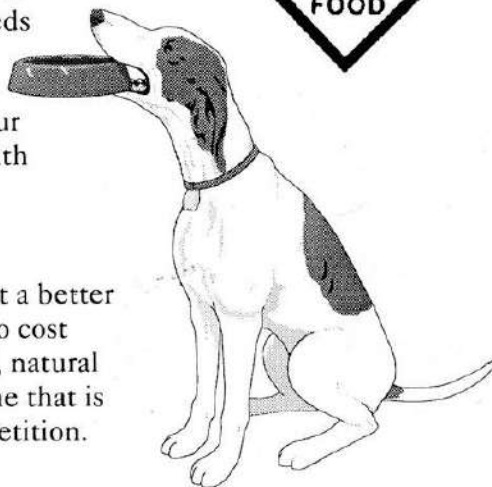
There are two things you should also know before getting a Toller. Actually three things. They get bored very quickly once they have caught on

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to the training drill. So you must be creative in your training. They are incredibly stoic and can handle a great deal of physical pain. I don't mean pain inflicted by you but pain caused by injury. If you are hard on your dog it will shut down completely. You can crush a Toller simply with the tone of your voice and that is all the training discipline you should ever need.

Tollers are eager, enthusiastic and tireless retrievers with the emphasis on tireless. This characteristic alone separates them from the other retriever breeds. Tollers can and will retrieve all day long and won't quit. Few of the other retriever breeds will maintain the retrieving enthusiasm the way a Toller does. And, when you get tired the Toller will find a way to create its own retrieving game.

For example, there is a Toller who takes his ball to the top of a big hill, lets the ball role down the hill and tries to catch it before it hits the bottom. He can keep this up for hours. They will take themselves for a water retrieve. My first Toller, a female,



when we were at the cottage in the early spring would spend hours retrieving leaves and sticks from the lake. I know a fella whose Toller, over the period of an afternoon, dragged the mooring buoy for his sailboat to the shore. The buoy was attached to an anchor that weighed nearly two hundred pounds.

Picture it! What a good dog for retrieving the mooring buoy, even though I didn't ask you to, but how the hell am I going to get the damn thing back out into the lake where it belongs? It took four of us to put it out there in the first place.

Can you use them for upland? I do. Getting them to hunt close, an age old problem, is the thing you have to work on. Tollers are excellent flushing dogs and they can track a scent as well as any retriever.

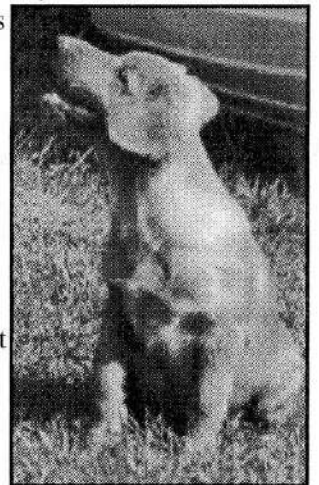
Should you get a Toller as a Field Trial dog? I wouldn't recommend it. Too much discipline involved. Tollers are creative problem solvers. The straightest way out and back is the credo of the Field Trial. If there is a harder way to get there, chances are the Toller will go that way just to add some spice to the retrieve. It would break the dog's spirit to force him to stop bringing some of his own creativity to the retrieve.

Why did I get into Tollers in the first place? When I began my quest for a hunting dog I lived in Toronto. Right in the heart of the city. I knew Labs, Goldens, Chessies and the like, need lots of room. Room I did not have. Nor did I want to see either of my two daughters body surfing down the side walk in the wake of a Lab bent on the destruction of the neighbour's cat. My first Toller slept under the crib of each of the girls, first one then the other, until they moved into their own bedrooms. Then she came back to sleeping on the floor beside our bed. She is gone now, but her son, soon to be twelve sleeps in her spot right beside the bed. As I am writing this I can hear him snoring just outside my office door.

How do you find out about Tollers? There have been articles about them in the US publications, Wildfowl and Gun Dog. In fact, the most recent issue of Wildfowl has a lengthy article about the Toller. And yet, in the most recent issue of Outdoor Canada, there is no mention of the Toller in the article written by Jim Lawrence about gundogs. In the June 1983, issue of Ontario Out Of Doors, there is very a good article about the Toller written by Wayne Adair. Actually it was Wayne who brought the Toller to the Annual Fall Hunting Show. This year marks the 14th anniversary of the Hunting Show and the 14th year the Toller will be represented.

The Toller is one of Canada's indigenous breeds along with the Newfoundland, the Canadian Eskimo Dog and the Taltan Bear Dog. The Lab, although it originated in Canada, really finds its home in the UK. There is

no book on the Toller, although I am told there should be one out soon. To get more information about the breed you can write to either my



wife Barbara, Secretary for the NSDTR Club of Ontario, RR #2, Rockwood, Ontario N0B 2K0 or, Lynn Vail the Secretary for the NSDTR Club of Canada, 804 707 7th Ave., New Westmister, BC V3M 2J2.

John Mitchell, has been breeding, training and hunting with his Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers since 1981. He and his wife Barbara, combine nearly thirty years of Toller experience. And yes Barbara hunts. Each has their own Toller. They also breed Labrador Retrievers.