

Hunting Style of the Curly-Coated Retriever

The Curly-Coated Retriever was developed in England in the early 1800s to find and retrieve game with little direction or comment. Originally bred by gamekeepers to put food on the table, they were used to clean up a field already covered by a driven shoot. Prized for innate field ability, courage and indomitable perseverance, a correctly built and tempered Curly will work as long as there is work to be done, retrieving game in the heaviest of cover or the iciest of waters.

Curlies are designated as retrievers by the AKC but historical anecdotes and bird dog book accounts portray them as versatile hunting dogs developed to assist in both waterfowl and upland bird hunting. To work all day a Curly must be balanced and sound, strong and robust, and quick and agile.

Training and experience will influence the nuances of a working Curly, but in all instances the dog should require little or no encouragement to hunt an open field, wetland or woods. A properly bred Curly will work a field at a moderate pace, suitable for a full day of hunting. The Curly will consistently utilize ground and air scent, along with experience to hunt the cover most likely to hold birds. An experienced Curly will conserve energy by shunning thin or likely non-productive cover, but will never avoid the thickest of cover, especially when directed by the handler. Because of this a Curly may not hunt in a defined “windshield wiper” pattern.

The Curly should naturally work within gun range, checking back periodically on its own or when called by the handler. Hunting underfoot is not acceptable. The dog will generally signal the presence of scent by an increasingly enthusiastic pace and noticeable tail movement. When hunting down wind the dog will often pirouette at the first indication of scent. Curlies should produce birds with an aggressive flush, although a “flash point” is neither uncommon nor undesirable.

Curlies should demonstrate good marking ability. If the dog misses the fall or a crippled bird moves the Curly should use its strong nose to find and follow the trail post-haste. Curlies are naturally independent and bore easily with repetitive drills as a result most do not handle as crisply as other retrievers. Since the ultimate goal is to retrieve the game the true measure of good handling is team work between the Curly and handler.

Curlies are natural retrievers and should promptly retrieve the bird for the handler. There should be no hesitancy to pick up the bird and the dog should not demonstrate any tendency toward hard mouth.

Curlies are excellent swimmers and should show no hesitancy to enter water. At the same time, Curlies are known to be “wickedly smart” and may choose the fastest route to the bird rather than the shortest distance.

To summarize: The Curly-Coated Retriever is a methodical hunting dog that utilizes its nose and experience to focus on the most productive cover. It does not hunt with a uniform pattern. Curlies should produce birds with an aggressive flush, although a “flash point” is neither uncommon nor undesirable. The curly should possess an excellent nose and demonstrate tireless trailing ability. Curlies must show a willingness to enter water but may take an indirect route to the bird if they believe there is a faster route.