

# All About Golden Retrievers

(the following information is from [TerrificPets.com](http://TerrificPets.com))

## History of the Golden Retriever:

Many individuals may be surprised to find out that the history of the Golden Retriever is not rooted in the United States, but rather in Scotland. Since this dog has become so popular in the USA as well as around the world, often people in America simply assume it is a North American breed. In reality the origins of the Golden Retriever are rather specific as to where the breed started, if not completely clear on what foundation stock was used.

The Golden Retriever was bred to be a hunting dog, specially designed to have a soft mouth. This term means that the dogs do not bite down on what they are retrieving, bringing waterfowl and birds back to the hunters completely undamaged. This is an essential factor in most of the retrieving types of dogs as smaller game birds would be literally crushed and destroyed by dogs that didn't have this naturally soft mouth.

The Golden Retriever was first bred by one breeder, Sir Dudley Majoribanks, who had an estate in the highlands of Scotland. In this remote area he worked through crossing known hunting dogs of many different types with larger boned and bodied dogs, ultimately producing the larger, stronger and natural strong swimmer known today. Surprisingly, Sir Majoribanks kept very detailed breeding records including the actual names and breeds of dog he used in the development of the Golden Retriever between the years of 1835 and 1890.

It is interesting to note that Sir Majoribanks actually became known as Baron Tweedmouth, a title that he held until his death in 1894. Baron Tweedmouth also slightly changed his developing breed of dogs in response to the newer, more higher powered hunting rifles and shotguns that were coming onto the market. The longer distances of accurate shots meant that more and more birds were downed farther from the hunters and outside of the sight range of the traditional pointer and setter hunting dog types. The retriever was therefore bred with a higher emphasis on scent and tracking abilities, allowing them to find birds at a far greater distance away from both the dog and the hunter.

The first dogs used in the breed program by Baron Tweedmouth were a Tweed Water Spaniel and a yellow colored Flat Coated Retriever. The Tweed Water Spaniel is a now extinct breed, however it is known to very closely resemble a liver colored variety of the modern Flat Coated Retriever. These were excellent water retrieval dogs that were also good at tracking and working through dense bush to find birds. This cross between the yellow coated Retriever of unknown specific breed and the Tweed Water Spaniel produced four puppies, which were then used as the foundation stock of the modern Golden Retriever. During the following generations infusions of Irish Setter, wavy coated black retrievers, and a rare sandy colored Bloodhound were recorded. In addition there were several instances where St. John's Water Dogs, a now extinct foundation breed for both Newfoundlands and Labrador Retrievers, were also used in the various lines in the Majoribanks kennels.

Rumors have persisted over many years that there was a variety of Russian dogs, specifically Russian Sheepdogs, which were purchased from a traveling circus and used in the breeding program. Although these rumors are widely believed by some people, the actual breeding records from the kennels do not indicate any outbreeding to Russian Sheepdogs or any other type of herding or working dog were used in the original or subsequent breeding programs. This is also somewhat borne out by the fact that Golden Retriever has no natural herding instincts or abilities and are not flock guardians.

The Kennel Club of the United Kingdom first accepted the Golden Retriever as the breed designated as Flat Coats "Golden" in 1903. It wasn't until 1911 that the breed was actually designed as a Retriever, at that time listed as both golden and yellow. The Golden Retriever Club was founded in 1913 and the breed name officially changed to Golden Retriever in 1920.

The first Golden Retriever was brought to Canada by Sir Majoribanks himself in 1881. They were recognized by the Canadian Kennel Club in 1927 and also by the American Kennel Club in 1925. Several kennels, most

founded by English and Scottish breeders, were found across both Canada and the United States by the early part of the 1940's. While they were popular as hunting dogs in both countries, they were also increasingly popular as companion dogs and farm dogs. Their gentle temperaments and high levels of intelligence made them perfect for most types of families.

As with many of the dog breeds imported to the United States there is now a slight physical difference between the Golden Retriever bred in the United Kingdom, known as the British type, and the Golden Retrievers bred in the United States. In general terms the British type of Golden Retriever tends to be stockier and heavier, while the American type is longer in the leg and taller, and there are specific height and weight ranges not seen in the standards in the United Kingdom.

The Golden Retriever continues to be one of the most popular of the larger sporting dogs in the world. They are also one of the most common dogs used in movies and television because of their calm and friendly nature combined with their high level of trainability. Some famous Golden Retrievers from the big screen and TV include Buddy, and the dogs that played Buddy, from the movies Air Bud, Brinkley from You've Got Mail, Speedy from the Drew Carey Show and Shadow the Golden Retriever from the Homeward Bound series of movies.

In addition several very famous people have owned Golden Retrievers. Gerald Ford, the 40th President of the United States owned a Golden Retriever named Liberty that was often photographed with the President. Oprah Winfrey had three Golden Retrievers at one time and Pamela Anderson owned a Golden Retriever named Star that appeared with her on Baywatch.

## **Breed Standards of the Golden Retriever:**

The American Kennel Club or AKC and the Canadian Kennel Club or CKC have slightly different standards for the Golden Retriever breed than does the Kennel Club of the United Kingdom or several other Kennel Clubs around the world. This is largely due to the fact that the American Golden Retriever tends to be a taller, rangier dog than the stockier, heavier bodied Golden Retriever favored in the United Kingdom. Both dogs are from the same breed, however, and are often used in breeding programs to enhance either type. It is interesting to note that the Canadian Kennel Club favors a standard that is more middle of the road than either the stockier UK breed standards or the leaner, lankier American standards.

The following is a very general description of the Golden Retriever from the American Kennel Club breed standards. These standards were approved by the AKC in 1981 and continue to be the standards used in all AKC sanctioned shows and events around the country. The Golden Retriever Club of America also uses the same standards for the breed.

The size of the Golden Retriever is very important in the AKC standards. Males are to be 65-75 pounds and females are 55-65 pounds in weight. The ratio of distance from the breastbone to the buttocks and the withers to the ground has to be 12:11, with the length just longer than the height. Males must be between 23 and 24 inches at the withers and females between 21½ and 22½ inches. Any deviation of more than an inch taller or shorter is an automatic disqualification. This size distinction is found in the AKC but not in the Kennel Club of the United Kingdom standards.

The head of the Golden Retriever is classical in its shape and typical of the retrieving types of dogs. The skull is wide and broad without any noticeable occipital or forehead bones, slightly arched and well balanced. The muzzle is slightly tapered from the base to the nose but square-ish and substantial in size. There is a slight stop but more blended than abrupt, making the head have flowing lines rather than angles. The eyes are medium to dark brown, round in shape and well set to the side, not narrow or close set. The eyes should not show any white when the dog is looking forward and any eye abnormalities should result in disqualification.

The nose is brown to black, with color fading and variations possible and acceptable. Pink colorations on the nose are not acceptable, nor are very small or pinched nostrils. The lips are moderately loose but not

pendant and the teeth meet in a scissors bite. The jaws should not be undershot or overshot.

Ears of the Golden Retriever are moderately small and turned over, falling flat to the sides of the face. They should not be long in the leather and should extend no farther than the eye when pulled forward.

The neck is strong and balanced without any bulking at the throat. The head and neck are carried high of the shoulders when the dog is at attention and should flow with the rest of the front quarters. The back or topline is flat from the withers to the hips, however the croup is slightly sloping. The dog's ribs are well sprung and the chest is deep and wide, but not bulky or heavy looking. The front legs are well positioned and the shoulder blades are flat and back, almost touching at the withers. The legs should extend fully forward and stay parallel to the body of the dog when in motion. The legs are straight when viewed from any angle and the feet are compact with thick pads.

The hind quarters are muscular and board with well bent stifles and hocks let down. This gives the dog the appearance of being ready to move whenever needed, but also keeping with balance and grace. The front and hind legs should be parallel to each other and should move forward in a straight line. When the dog is moving quickly the legs should move towards a center line under the dog's body, but should not be a single track at walking paces or jogging paces.

The tail of the Golden Retriever is thick at the base, narrowing to the tip. If let down the tail extends to the hock but not beyond. When in motion the tail is carried high but not curled up over the back or timidly tucked between the legs. The tail should be well fringed with a lighter coloration on the lower side than the top of the tail.

The coat of the Golden Retriever is truly beautiful, thick and dense but also staying flatter to the body, not fluffy or wiry. It can be any color of gold but not yellow or red. The coat is always a rich color and very pale colored coats or coats ranging to an orange or dark color are serious faults. Puppies may have lighter coats and the fringing may be lighter than the body on adult dogs and still be very acceptable. The coat should not have any white or black patches, although a very few white hairs on the chest is not a fault or disqualification.

The body will have natural feathering on the backs of the legs, the tail, front of the neck and the underbody. The hair on the face, front of the legs and the ears and the paws should be short and even. The paws can be trimmed for show. The longer coat on the body and the feathering can be slightly wavy to straight, but should never be curly.

The temperament of the Golden Retriever is very important in the show ring. He or she needs to be confident and friendly, alert and intelligent. Any signs of aggression towards other dogs in the ring or towards the judge will be considered a fault. Dogs that are very timid or shy will also be faulted.

## **Health Concerns with Golden Retrievers:**

The Golden Retriever is a wonderful dog to own for many reasons. As with any breed that has become very popular, there are many people that have bred Golden Retrievers not in the best interest of the breed but rather to make a quick profit. It should be noted that most of these individuals are not true breeders or those that have legitimate kennels; rather they are individuals that are simply in it for the short term. The result of these backyard breeders, plus the puppies produced in puppy mills, has led to some health problems within some lines in the Golden Retriever breed.

This unfortunate situation is not uncommon in any popular breed of dog. The good news is that buying from a reputable breeder that knows the breed and is more interested in the dogs than the profit will greatly minimize the chance that your puppy will have any of the inherited types of disease and conditions. Always check to ensure that both parent dogs have been hip and eye checked and certified and any reputable breeder will provide this information, typically without even a request. Most breeders also will only sell to approved buyers, so you may have to go through an application process. Talk to a breeder about any

questions you have regarding health issues with Golden Retrievers and also do some research on your own.

The Golden Retriever is not an extremely long lived dog and the typical lifespan for the breed is between 10 to 12 years. There are Golden Retrievers that do live into their mid-teens, but this is not common within the breed. Most dogs, when fed properly, routinely exercised and not allowed to become obese will remain moderately active throughout their senior years. Some Golden Retrievers used as hunting dogs continue in the field well into their later life.

As can be expected with any larger breed, canine hip dysplasia can certainly be a significant issue within the Golden Retrievers, as it is within a great many of the other sporting breeds. The incidence of canine hip dysplasia is higher in American and Canadian bred Golden Retrievers than in British and United Kingdom bred dogs, likely because the American standard is calling for a taller, leggier dog while the UK standard has the shorter legs. This difference in skeletal structure may somewhat diminish the pressure on the hip joint ligaments, resulting in less serious conditions.

The good news about canine hip dysplasia is that it can be managed in all but the most severe cases. New surgical procedures as well as the various non-steroid long use medications to help with pain relieve and even rebuilding the joints are proving effective. Feeding a good, high quality diet and given the dog lots of exercise to keep weigh within the normal range can also help in both reduction of problems as well as in keeping the range of motion in the joint as normal as possible.

The biggest and most life threatening condition for most Golden Retriever is cancer. It is estimated that about 60% of all Golden Retriever that die in a given year are affected by cancer of one or more types. This breed is very prone to several types of cancers, with the most frequently diagnosed being hemangiosarcoma. This particular type of cancer is also common in the German Shepherd breed, however in Golden Retrievers it is the single most commonly found cancer type. Typically hemangiosarcoma is an internal type of tumor that tends to show few if any signs until it is massive in size or has ruptured. The tumors are often found on the spleen, liver, heart or more rarely the central nervous system. Less often the tumors can also be found on the skin.

Since the condition is typically not detected until the tumor has ruptured or is completely impeding the organ, there is little that can be done in the way of treatment. In some cases the affected organ can be surgically removed and chemotherapy completed, however survival is typically less than one year after the treatment. Skin types of cancers, including mast cell tumors, have a much higher survival rate. Other types of cancers found in Golden Retriever include lymphosarcoma or cancer of the lymph glands or osteosarcoma, cancer of the bones.

Eye conditions can be found in the breed and can include treatable issues such as entropion, which is turned in eyelids, to cataracts, which can be treated surgically under specific conditions. More problematic issues include progressive retinal atrophy, which will lead to eventual blindness, or retinal dysplasia, which may cause loss of sight or visual impairments.

Heart conditions such as cardiomyopathy and subvalvular aortic stenosis (SAS) occur within the breed. SAS is a malformation of the heart that is present at birth and results in a murmur and restricted blood flow through the heart. Over time the condition may worsen, often very suddenly, resulting in death. Other dogs may live relatively normal lives with restricted activity and careful monitoring. Keeping the dog's health and weight optimal is essential for dogs with either cardiomyopathy or SAS. Von Willebrand's Disease (vWD), a condition that occurs when a lack of clotting factors exist in the blood, is also noted within the Golden Retriever. This condition is not always severe and many dogs live very healthy lives with vWD.

Skin allergies and severe types of hot spots on the skin are a real problem in the heavy coat of the Golden Retriever. Routine grooming and proper nutrition and care can help prevent this from becoming a problem, or from secondary infections from developing.

Although this may seem daunting, most of these conditions are also found within any of the other breeds of large dogs. Always ask for the health records of both the mother and the father dog's lines, going back as many generations as possible. Since most of the conditions mentioned above have some genetic component, there is a way to screen for the most significant issues.

## **Is a Golden Retriever a Good Match for My Family?**

The good natured, lovable and loyal Golden Retriever is a wonderful breed of dog. However, like all dogs, they will require ongoing training, attention and exercise, and are definitely a high maintenance breed when it comes to grooming. In addition the Golden Retriever does have a higher rate of some types of cancers and eye conditions than other breeds, so owners have to be diligent in getting the dog to routine vet appointments as well as caring for the dog.

There are several questions listed below that individuals considering a Golden Retriever should consider before deciding if this is the right breed for you. As with any dog, knowing all the pros and the possible cons to the breed will ensure that you are prepared to work with the dog to make the match work for you both.

### **Are you prepared to groom your dog every day?**

A Golden Retriever has a beautiful coat that is dense, thick and shiny when it is well cared for. This coat, however, comes with a price. A Golden Retriever does need to have daily grooming or at least every other day grooming to stay in top shape. Even a couple of missed grooming routines is going to result in mats, some which will spread very rapidly, leading to having to cut chunks out of the hair or work for a significant amount of time to remove the mats and knots. The Golden Retriever should never be clipped or shaved as this will damage the coat significantly.

Throughout the year the Golden Retriever will be an average shedder, grooming will help reduce the hair loss fairly significantly. However, during the spring and fall the dog will completely blow their coat, which means they shed the woolly, dense undercoat. During this time your house and yard will be covered with cream colored clumps of dog hair that seems to be endless. There is no way to prevent this from happening, but again routine grooming with an undercoat rake will help minimize the unwanted shedding throughout the house.

### **Do you want a watchdog or a dog that is very friendly and welcoming to everyone?**

Although most Golden Retriever are good watchdogs and do bark very loudly to let you know someone new is approaching, they are not guard dogs by nature. The breed is simply too trusting of humans and too friendly by nature to be aggressive towards a person. Some may be more territorial towards other dogs, however this is usually easily overcome once the two dogs are properly introduced.

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### **Are you prepared to use positive training methods?**

Even though the Golden Retriever is not a dominant type of breed, they will assume the leadership role in the family if the humans are not effective, consistent and firm in their training. This means that the dog understands when the human gives a command they will get positive attention and perhaps a reward, but if they choose to ignore the command they will likewise be ignored and corrected. If a Golden Retriever learns that he or she can do what they choose to do, they will soon become disobedience although still a very affectionate and loving dog.

A Golden Retriever that doesn't have routine training and at least basic obedience can be challenging to

work with. As a dog that can mature to over 80 pounds, they need to be under control at all time. This include early and consistent leash training to prevent the dog from dragging you around the block rather than going for a walk in the direction of your choosing.

### **Are you prepared to routinely walk and exercise the dog?**

While the Golden Retriever is not a highly demanding dog when it comes to exercise, they do need routine walks, jogs and play times each and every day. When they are young, Golden Retrievers that don't get enough exercise will be rambunctious and can be very hyperactive when people first get home from a day away. Routine exercise will prevent this from becoming a bad habit and a real problem.

Older Golden Retrievers tend to be less hyperactive but they are still a dog that was bred for an active lifestyle. Unlike many of the sporting dog breeds the Golden Retriever can adapt to apartment life and they are typically very calm and sedate in the house, provided that they have routine exercise, longer run times and lots of play. Ideally a Golden Retriever does best when they have a large fenced yard to spend time exploring and playing in, and a loving family to spend time with inside in bad weather or whenever anyone is home.

Golden Retrievers love to fetch as well as run free, so finding a rural area of a large dog off-leash park where the dog can really play and enjoy his or herself is a great option. Since the Golden Retriever is such as social dog they also love to play with other dogs in the park, a great mental and physical activity for a solo dog living in a one pet household.

Making the decision to get a Golden Retriever, as with any dog, is a consideration that should go on for the length of the dog's life. These lovable dogs bond with their family and while they can be rehomed, it is always best if they can stay with their original family throughout their life. As there are some significant health issues with the breed, always purchase from a reputable breeder and be sure to ask for hip and eye certifications as well as the health records of both parents.

### **Grooming and Caring for a Golden Retriever:**

The very luxurious, soft and slightly wavy coat of the Golden Retriever is one of the most distinguishing features of the breed. Caring for the coat of the Golden Retriever is very important, as there are some significant factors that owners need to be aware of with the breed.

The first and most obvious is that the Golden Retriever is a double coated breed. As with most dogs with this type of coat they are moderate shedders year round, however routine grooming can really help in cutting down on the amount of hair that is shed on a daily basis. A Golden Retriever that is brushed daily or at least five times a week will actually shed only a moderate to a small amount hair in the house for most of the year.

Double coated breeds typically "blow" their coat, a term that is used to describe the heavy shed that occurs usually in the early spring and the fall season. The Golden Retriever is absolutely no different and there is nothing that can be done to prevent this shedding from happening. The double coat means that the breed has a heavier, thicker outer coat covering a dense, almost woolly like inner coat. This combination of coats works to both insulate and protect the dog, plus to help the coat stay water resistant. The two coats also work to protect the skin from any types of abrasions, scratches or other harsh elements.

This highly protective coat can also be a problem for the Golden Retriever. The outer and inner coats can actually work against the dog, especially during the heavy shedding season when most of the inner coat is shed. The woolly inner coat can easily mat and tangle, including both the other parts of the inner coat as well as the thicker, outer coat. These tangles and mats, if not removed immediately will continue to mat, resulting in huge, massive, solid chunks of hair. Typically this tends to form around the base of the tail, on

the breaches of the hind legs, around the front legs and around the throat area. Not only are these tangles unsightly but they can cause significant skin problems over time.

Under the mats the skin will become rubbed, causing abrasions and lesions that may only be surface deep. This opens the skin up to bacterial infections, plus it also can lead to very deep lesions as the dog scratches or chews to attempt to remove the hair mat.

One of the most important tools to have in your grooming supplies is an undercoat rake, also known as a grooming rake. This is a very sturdy, longer toothed combination between a brush and comb. The undercoat rake is absolutely essential in keeping the coat of the Golden Retriever in good shape all year round.

To use the grooming rake start by pushing the coat, both the inner and outer coat up and forward, then use the grooming rake to groom the coat back down and towards the back. Never groom against the direction of hair growth, this can cause the individual hair shafts break and may increase tangling and matting problems.

Grooming, if done on a daily or every other day basis, will only take a few minutes, however if the dog is not routinely groomed it can take significantly longer. Grooming is also important as it gives you time to check the dog's skin, as the Golden Retriever may be prone to skin allergies and this can give you a chance to check for hot spots or irritated areas.

At grooming the dog's nails should be checked and clipped as necessary. The teeth can also be cleaned, either by using a doggy toothbrush and toothpaste or one of the specialized dog chew toys that have bristles or rubberized protrusions designed to clean the teeth all the way down to the gums. Check the teeth for any discoloration or any signs of irritation, bleeding or swelling of the gums. This can indicate periodontal diseases such as gingivitis, which can also be a sign of other health conditions.

The longer, turned over ears of the Golden Retriever also need to be routinely checked for any signs of wax build up or infection. Often if dogs are in and out of the water the ideal conditions for bacterial problems in the ears can occur. The first signs of problems are typically a foul smell in the ears, irritated, swollen or red coloration in the inner ear, and the obvious wax in the ears. In serious infections the wax may be discharged from the ears and the dog may constantly shake their head, rub their head on the ground or scratch at the ears. Early detection can typically cure the infection with a bit of cleaning of the outer part of the inside of the ear. Use a soft, cloth on your finger, never use human ear cleaning products or Q-tips or swabs as there is a risk of damaging the ear if the dog moves his or her head suddenly. It is also very important not to attempt to insert anything into the ear, instead schedule an appointment with the vet. They may choose to flush the ear out with a cleaning and drying solution, removing the deeper layers of wax and debris. Ear drops may also be required.

To clean the coat of the Golden Retriever it is important to avoid using any type of human hair products. There are hypoallergenic dog shampoos that can be used, but full wet bathing should only be done as necessary. This is because the coat has natural oils that can be stripped or removed from the coat, even with mild dog shampoos. Dry shampoos, which are like powders that can deodorize and remove debris from the coat and skin are a good option instead of a complete bath.

High quality food that is rich in Omega 3 and 6 is great for the coat. Feeding a raw foods diet or at least providing meaty knuckle bones for the dog can also help with coat condition. These bones are also very helpful in dental health and helping the dog maintain a natural digestive process.

## **Socializing and Training Golden Retrievers:**

The Golden Retriever is often considered to be an ideal choice for a first time dog owner that wants a larger sized, very friendly and very intelligent dog. This is not to say that a Golden Retriever will be a good match for every family since they are a high maintenance breed when it comes to grooming and somewhat to exercise. However, they don't have the dominant temperament associated with many of the larger dogs that can make training and socialization a challenge for first time dog owners.

Ideally all puppies, regardless of their breed, should go through some type of puppy obedience training. This provides both a structured approach to the basics of obedience work, plus it also provides tips to the owners as to how to more effectively work with their dogs. In addition the socialization aspect of the puppy obedience classes is hard to match unless you have several friends all with puppies that are willing to arrange for doggy get-togethers for socialization.

If you are considering a puppy obedience class it is important to work with a trainer that has experience in using only positive training methods with the dogs. You do not want to take a Golden Retriever through an obedience class that is more focused on punishment than they are on rewarding the dogs for the right thing. As a highly intelligent breed that is sensitive to the owner's voice and body language, negative training methods can actually cause this breed to become turned off from any type of response. Positive training methods that reward the dog for small and large steps in training are the best methods for the Golden Retriever.

You may wish to consider a training class that uses the clicker method of training. This is a positive reward system in which the owner uses a small plastic clicker to signal the dog that they are on the right track. Since you can click much faster than you can speak, the dog makes a very fast connection with the sound and the activity they are supposed to do. Over time the clicker can be faded out, but can always be used again when teaching another new command.

Socialization, despite the calm and dog friendly temperament of the Golden Retriever is still an essential component of the early months and years of the dog's life. Since they are so dog friendly, the Golden Retriever is a great dog for an off-leash park and there is rarely any concern with aggression. Male Golden Retrievers will be naturally aggressive towards other males if females in heat are present, but neutering males will prevent this from being an issue. Typically Golden Retrievers will bark at other dogs approaching their territory, but once the dog is introduced they will not be territorial or possessive of their toys or space.

Golden Retrievers make outstanding obedience dogs at all levels. It is interesting to note that the first three grand champion American Kennel Club obedience winners were all Golden Retrievers, and the breed continues to be well represented in the standings each year. The high level of attention that the Golden Retriever is able to focus on their handler combined with their thinking abilities and outstanding disposition and willingness to follow commands makes these dogs ideal competitors.

Occasionally younger Golden Retrievers may be a bit distractible for obedience work, however proper exercise, lots of socialization and continued work with the dogs will correct this very minor issue. Working with the dogs in a quieter, distraction free environment may be a consideration until the dog has mastered the command. Typically high strung or highly distractible Golden Retrievers are poorly socialized dogs that have not been provided the attention and exercise that the breed requires. Retraining and building a trust relationship between the owner and the dog will often correct this problem relatively quickly.

Another great way for the Golden Retriever to shine in competitive events is in agility competitions. Even though they are a larger dog they can easily weave through the poles, take the obstacles and jump, climb and run through the courses with ease. Again the dog's ability to problem solve and think as well as follow commands makes them a great match for the event.

One lesser known dog competition the Golden Retriever really stands out in is dock jumping. This event is popular in the United States, Canada, Germany, Australia and the United Kingdom. In this event a specially surfaced dock is designed over a body of water that is not less than four feet deep. Dogs run down the length of the dock and jump out over the water, attempting to jump the farthest distance from the dock. Owners can use a chase toy that is thrown into the water to encourage the dogs to jump. The jump is measured from the dock to the part of the body that enters the water closest to the dock, typically the dog's tail or hind legs. The distance is measured just like a human long jump, but typically digital photographs are used to provide an accurate measurement. Some of these dogs jump an amazing distance before hitting the water, with distances of over 24 feet airborne not considered unusual.

Golden Retrievers are also ideal candidates for other types of dog competitions. They are now seen in Flyball and Frisbee type events where their speed and agility is well paired with their hard working and focused



behavior. They are also starting to come to competitions of canine freestyle dancing and heelwork to music, both events that require intense focus as well as outstanding communication between the dog and the owner.

Finally, the Golden Retriever can also go back to its roots as a hunting breed and compete at championship levels in field dog trails. Their incredible swimming ability combined with their scenting and tracking skills ensures that they will place high in the competition. Training Golden Retriever to hunt does require specific skills, however the natural instincts of the dog are still evident and they often are very gifted without a lot of training requirements.

## **Golden Retrievers as Guide and Assistance Dogs:**

The Golden Retriever's natural calm temperament, very low level dog aggression, high intelligence and true love for his or her owner and family makes the breed an ideal guide or assistance dog. Since they are also substantial in size without being overly large and have been bred for strength and endurance, their physical attributes as well as their temperament is a perfect match. In addition the friendliness towards strangers and the very accepting temperament of the Golden Retriever is really idea for this very demanding type of working situation.

The Golden Retriever used as a guide or assistance dog is often not a purebred, registered dog, although they may also be of purebred lineage. Some common hybrids that are used as guide or assistance dogs include the Goldendoodle, a cross between a Golden Retriever and a Standard Poodle and a Golden Labrador, a cross between the Golden Retriever and the Labrador Retriever. The advantage to the Goldendoodle is this hybrid tends to be lower shedding dog, however they are usually not completely non-shedding and may or may not be hypoallergenic.

Starting the Golden Retriever off with basic obedience is the first step in becoming a guide or assistance dog. This typically occurs in a specially selected and approved foster family that has been trained in what to do with the young puppy. Socialization with a wide number of animals, places and people figures in prominently in this type of training. The family will also provide different activities for the puppy and young dog, reporting back to the trainers as to how the puppy is progressing. Puppies that appear to be overly aggressive, timid or are showing difficulties in mastering basic obedience work may not be carried forward in the program. There are, however, typically waiting lists of people interested in adopting these puppies as they are often wonderfully trained dogs that just aren't suited for the demanding job of a guide or assistance job.

From the puppy stage, dogs that are eligible for formal training typically go into a training facility. This may include partial training in a prison system, where inmates actually work with professional dog trainers to provide the advanced levels of obedience. These programs are especially popular for assistance dogs and they allow both the inmates and the young dogs to acquire new skills in a very well supervised environment.

From this type of basic training, further screening is done to again select the top dogs from the group. Although there is always a significant number of applications for guide and assistance dogs, reputable trainers only use the highest quality and most intelligent of the dogs going through the classes. This is because the new owners will be literally trusting the dogs with their lives in most cases, so only the best suited dogs are used.

At this stage the dogs enter into intensive training programs by specially trained and licensed guide and assistance dog trainers. Some of these programs are managed by national groups such as the Guide Dogs of America, while others may be on the state level. Each training program will have their own specific criteria for the dogs, however typically they are more similar than dissimilar.

Training for the Golden Retriever will include how to get on and off public transportation, how to travel by airplane, ride on escalators and in elevators, entering buildings and understanding how to be an effective guide for the blind individual. This will include learning to watch for potential dangers to the human. These

dangers can be issues such as oncoming traffic, low hanging branches or even irregular surfaces that may be dangerous. Dogs are also taught "intelligent disobedience" which means they may, if danger is present, not respond to a command.

This intelligent disobedience is partly trained and partially a natural response by the dog. For example, if a blind individual was to command the dog to walk forward, but the dog was able to see that the sidewalk was blocked off for construction, the dog is trained to stand across the owner's legs, preventing him or her from walking forward. This is a very important part of training for guide dogs as it is an issue of life and safety for the owner.

Assistance dogs and guide dogs alike may also be trained to position themselves to provide support for the owner in moving about or getting up or down. Bracing or standing to allow the human to use the dog as a way to stand is an essential part of training for most assistance and guide dogs. Assistance dogs may also be taught to fetch a phone on command or to push a panic button in the event that the owner is unable to call for help.

Typically once the dog has gone through their training and passed all temperament and physical requirement tests, they are paired with a human counterpart. Ideally this pairing will be for the life of the dog and the trainers and staff work very diligently to pair the dog with the best match for an owner. With Golden Retrievers the owners do need to have the ability to care for the dog, which includes daily grooming and exercise for the dog.

New owners and the dogs work with the trainers for a set period of time. For people working with the Guide Dogs of America group this training is typically one month, with the owners getting to know about the dog's needs as well as how to work together as a team. The new owners have to also learn how to trust the dog to take them safely through their day. Once the owners and the dogs have finished the training they graduate from the program and return to their home. Ongoing follow up is typically provided on an as needed basis for either first time dog owners or those that have had a guide or assistance dog before.

Any dogs that don't work with the new owner can be matched with another owner or, if there is a temperament or health issue with the dog, they can be adopted out to a loving family and live their life as a pet and companion dog.