



Jane Harding – Cutwater Portuguese Water Dogs

Jane Harding of Cutwater Portuguese Water Dogs in Chester, Connecticut, owes her introduction to the breed to “Simon & Schuster’s Guide to Dogs.”

When her husband commented that it was time for their growing family to get a dog, Harding started flipping through that classic tome, eventually landing on a photograph of a rather unattractive Portuguese Water Dog. But remembering that both her mother and aunt in her native England had a “hairy black dog” — and noting that the book said the breed was good with children – she decided the wavy-haired water dog was the perfect choice.

Today, Harding is president of the Nutmeg Portuguese Water Dog Club and both delegate and president of her regional all-breed club, the Ox Ridge Kennel Club. In addition, she is an approved parent-club mentor, an AKC Platinum Breeder of Merit and the breeder of more than 150 conformation champions, as well as many obedience, agility, rally and scent work titled dogs. Despite all the champions, Harding is proudest of her dual-titled dogs because her primary goal is to produce correct, beautiful dogs that adhere to the breed standard, and that can also work at high levels. She wants beauty, form, and brains. A Cutwater dog still has the distinction of being the only Portuguese Water Dog to be invited to the AKC National



Championship for both breed and agility. Though she loves the show ring, she vastly prefers finishing class animals to the high-pressure stakes of campaigning a special, and also finds time to train her dogs in obedience, rally and what they love best — water work.



Photo Credit: Phyllis Ensley Photography

Here, Harding talks about the Obama factor, where judges go wrong and making a splash.

Auspicious beginnings: “After I bought my puppy, the breeder called to ask if I would show her at the Greenwich Kennel Club show because she was trying to get a major on her brother. So, I went to handling class, drove two hours, showed my dog in retriever clip — and I beat a professional handler in my class! Once, after having some showing experience with my first dog, I beat all the professionals, even Beth Sweigart — we still laugh about it. Thirty years later, here I am.”

Then and now: “There are a lot more, better-quality dogs, and a lot more choices. The temperaments are way better today than they used to be, but you need to put some of that down to the positive training that is now prevalent. Negative training methods do not work well for this breed. The biggest misconception is that they are an easy dog, but they are not the breed for everybody. For the most part, temperament always was, and I think always will be, that of a Working breed. They think too much.”



POTUS puppy: “When the Obamas got a Portuguese Water Dog, they gave the breed a small boost, and I think it was for the better. We, the breeders and the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America, also controlled the publicity: The AKC made sure all the information was very carefully directed to the breed’s benefit.

The once-over: “Some judges don’t go over the dog adequately— but it’s vitally important. Judges don’t often enough examine the head. This is always a hands-on breed. I work very hard to groom those faults out: By moving the lion clip up and down, you can change the position of head and neck, you can change the length of loin. We have a lot we can diddle with!”

The shoe drops: “When GM1, which is a neurological disorder, first surfaced in the breed — and in my second litter — I wrote to our breeders. At the time there were about 30, and I said, ‘Hey, guys, we have a problem here. This dog has a genetic disease.’ Thank goodness our parent-club board took it on, and since then we’ve dealt with every health issue from a breeder and board level, and I think magnificently. We are upfront and open about it.”

Life lesson: “At first, I was in denial about my dog carrying a lethal gene, and at first people wanted to put carriers down. The initial reaction was ‘Oh, get rid of it,’ and people were quite rude about that. But these days, we breed carriers — to non-carriers, of course. The goal is to produce healthy puppies, and a carrier, if carefully bred, doesn’t hurt anyone, because it takes two to

tango. As long as nobody gets an affected dog, I will continue to breed carriers who are beautiful, sweet, quality dogs. We are much more mature breeders. We live with it, but we are careful.”

No shock, all awe: “I think puppy people are impressed by a Breeder of Merit. To me, it shows how important it is that a breeder is out there showing her dogs and doing things with her dogs — not sitting in her backyard saying, ‘I have the perfect Portuguese.’”

Active tense: “In general, I’d say Portuguese Water Dogs are pain-in-the-neck, bitey puppies. They need people to live with them and positively teach them, and you need to interact with them. It’s not a lay-about dog. You get a Portuguese Water Dog because you want to do stuff with your dog. But a lot of puppy people buy them because they are non-shedding, and that is a real disadvantage to the breed, because they don’t think of the training and the needs of an active dog.”

Water, water everywhere: “We love our waterwork. I give up my obedience class each summer to do water training. It’s huge fun. There are some dogs who don’t love it, but it is a scant few. The rest love digging in the water bowl and making a complete mess.”

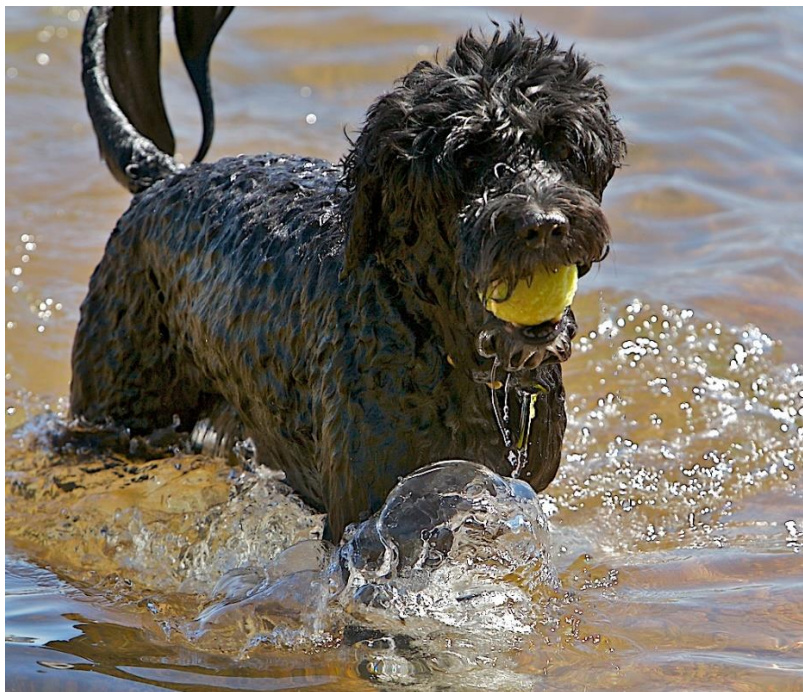


Photo Credit: David Barry