The Golden Retriever Puppy Handbook
About the Author

R. Ann Johnson became a Golden Retriever person in the 1960s when she acquired her first Golden as a companion for her aging German Shepherd. She has been intimately involved in Goldens ever since. She is the founder of Gold-Rush Kennels, located in Wrightstown, New Jersey. Her Goldens (owned, bred, or sired) have produced more than 300 American champions and numerous Canadian champions. Her national record holders include Am. Can. Bda. Ch. Cummings' Gold-Rush Charlie OS SDHF (Top Sporting Dog in the country and #1 Golden in 1974 and 1975, sire of 59 champions), Ch. Stone’s Gold-Rush Shilo SDHF (#1 Golden in 1980), and Ch. Lizzie’s Gold-Rush Echo OS SDHF (#1 Golden in 1985, sire of 18 champions). Other prominent dogs in the history of the breed, all descendants of Charlie, were Ch. Gold-Rush’s Great Teddy Bear OS, sire of 50 champions and Ch. Gold-Rush Copper Lee Apollo OS, sire of 42 champions. Two outstanding dogs, Ch. Russo’s Gold-Rush Sensation and Ch. Gold-Rush Wild Trout OS, earned the dual title CH.-OTCH. Many progeny of dogs of her breeding have excelled in obedience, as working dogs, and even as Junior, Master, and Senior hunters. Gold-Rush dogs have also been utilized as guide dogs for the blind, as narcotics- and explosive-detection dogs, and as therapy dogs.

Ann holds an A.B. in Biology from Douglass College and an M.S. in Zoology from Rutgers University, where she completed her Ph.D. research in Developmental Biology. While at Rutgers she received a National Science Foundation traineeship grant and taught courses in Comparative Anatomy, Embryology, and Genetics. In the 1970s she taught at Georgian Court College and was Coadjutant Professor of Biology at The College of New Jersey, where she taught courses in Anatomy and Physiology, Developmental Biology, Embryology, and Principles of Biology. At the high-school level, she also taught Advanced Placement Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, and Genetics.

In the 1980s, Ann turned her attention full time to maintaining and improving her Golden Retriever breeding program and was listed frequently by Golden Retriever World as one of the top breeders (in terms of number of champions bred each year). She maintains a special interest in educating those newly involved in and devoted to Golden
Retrievers. She has helped in Animal Rescue, has judged at her Club’s Specialty Show, and has been corresponding secretary for her Club, where she has been a Board member and participated on the Committee that developed “Principles, Responsibilities and Guidelines” for Club members. For clients and friends, she publishes an occasional newsletter that addresses current issues and concerns pertaining to the breed.

Ann is a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and keeps current in matters of science and scientific research through journals such as *Bioscience, Nature, Science*, and *Scientific American*. She is listed in *Who’s Who in Dogs* (Howell, 1998) as one of “a small number [of people in the sport of purebred dogs] who has made a lasting and significant contribution.”

A member of the Golden Retriever Club of America (GRCA) for 29 years, Ann has made it her goal in recent years to bring a group of talented individuals who can work together to maintain the tradition and type set forth by Gold-Rush Charlie and to improve the breed.

The Publisher
THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER PUPPY HANDBOOK

The Care and Training of a Golden Retriever Puppy from Seven Weeks through Twelve Months

by

R. Ann Johnson

Including
“Your Puppy’s First Visit to the Vet,” An Interview with Jean H. Cunningham-Smith, VMD

Illustrations by Karin Walter

The Darwin Press, Inc.
Princeton, New Jersey
Dedicated to all the folks at Gold-Rush
Who have contributed so much
to the Breed and to

Charlie

Who was the true founder of Gold-Rush
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Health concerns and issues discussed in this book should not replace the medical advice of your veterinarian, who can best evaluate any signs or symptoms of a condition and treat illnesses.

Descriptive names of products, trade marks, or trade names, regardless of their use in this book, should not be used elsewhere.
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Preface

There was once a physicist who never took part in discussions with his colleagues and also didn’t want to publish anything. His colleagues believed he was quite intelligent and very knowledgeable, but they were not sure and, to remove all doubt, they kept urging him to publish. One day, he yielded to their requests and finally published an article, and everyone in his department read it. And when afterward they talked about it, everyone agreed . . . they still didn’t quite know for sure.

Well, I’ve been asked by numerous people to write on the topic of the care and training of puppies, but I’m feeling like the inscrutable physicist who was urged on by his colleagues to publish in order to remove all doubt about his competence. Why inscrutable? Because this is a subject about which, I believe, there are no easy answers. And I know you want answers.

There are many breeders who have opinions, but I submit there are almost as many variations on the “truth” as there are breeders. If you have an opinion on any of the subjects presented here, and you differ in your opinion, all I can say is, “you may be right.” For those of you who are confused about, or unacquainted with, any or all of these subjects, perhaps I can help you by offering a way of looking at the subject as I do and by suggesting guidelines about what to do and what to look for.

It’s really not possible for me to predict the outcome of all the factors that combine to go into the development of your Golden, who must cope with you and your unique world. I will try to explain the Golden’s innate nature so that you may better meet his needs and mold him into the companion that you desire. As a breeder, my responsibility toward the Golden Retriever and toward the breed and to you—as owner, guardian, and caretaker—is truly one that I regard as a privilege.

A scientific approach to responsible breeding remains a top priority for me. By this I mean that “science” implies a dimension of change; we are learning and changing our perceptions and perspectives almost on a daily basis. Truth in understanding also is not immutable. Hypotheses explain the data, but as more is learned, the hypotheses
(the interpretation of reality) need to be changed or revised to fit new observations. For instance, I believe not everything is known about so-called genetic defects. For breeders and owners to focus exclusively on the genetic component and not take into consideration environmental influences ignores a major component of what goes into producing healthy Goldens. Breeders have an added responsibility to know how certain bloodlines mix; they also need to have the freedom to make the best decisions on their own in the interest of breed purpose, type, and soundness.

* * * * * * *

For more than thirty years I have been raising my Gold-Rush Golden Retrievers and have enjoyed seeing these puppies go off to become happy members of many families. The relationship between the Golden and his family is very special because nothing pleases the Golden more than to be with his family.

My purpose in writing this book is to help members of the human family recognize and meet the needs of the Golden Retriever they are fortunate to own. These pages are designed to acquaint you with an overall picture of the breed as well as the many specifics you will need in order to manage a puppy properly and to allow him to develop into the best dog possible.

Further, I hope this book will be of value both to new puppy owners as well as responsible breeders of Golden Retrievers who address questions posed by owners of their new puppies. These observations and ideas of course are based on my own experience, reading, personal research, and interactions with responsible breeders past and present, and I trust they may be of some benefit to those who believe, as I do, that a thorough knowledge of the breed will enable us to enjoy better the unique qualities of our beloved Goldens.

I do not regard this book as a definitive work on puppy management and training, or a reference book on canine pediatrics. It is basically a compilation of responses to questions people have asked me during the course of more than three decades of working with new puppy owners and their families. In addition I refer to matters that I have found interesting as a biologist and to situations and "laws of na-
ture" that have helped me understand those Goldens that have been such a great part of my life.

This book is not intended to supplant the contribution of the veterinarian responsible for the health of our puppies, but it does contain material, including my interview with Jean H. Cunningham-Smith, VMD, that, I hope, will be helpful in understanding the valuable contribution of your veterinarian to the lifetime care of your puppy.
Acknowledgments

Many people have helped me understand the breed by sharing their knowledge, by giving me feedback, and by asking questions, sometimes difficult questions, where the answers are not readily apparent. To all, I can only express my grateful appreciation, for it is quite impossible to thank properly all of the people who helped with the process of writing this book from conception to completion. For that reason, the following list is woefully incomplete.

Since I’m at heart a people person, I always rely on friends and relatives to help with any project; I have seldom been let down. In response to my pleas for input, once again, many close friends and associates readily responded with their personal expertise and suggestions. At the beginning I must mention Jean H. Cunningham-Smith, VMD and Larry Smith, VMD, whose advice through the years has been exceptional and unconditional. Kim Johnson and Robin Meirs have stood by me and have shared so much of their lives in dogs, almost on a daily basis. I have been able to count on other special friends through the years, who, without fail, have always gone the extra mile for me: Craig Westergaard, Judy Breuer, and my fabulous illustrator, Karin Walter, and her husband Dick Walter—all of whom have been special friends for many years and a part of Gold-Rush from its beginning.

Ed Briggs, who co-owns two champions with me and is the author of our website, was one of the first people to suggest that I write a handbook on puppy care and training; his constant encouragement kept me hard at work completing the task of finally writing this book.

My thanks to Nancy Talbott and Cathie Turner, who graciously agreed to read the manuscript and made helpful comments.

Larry C. Johnson deserves a special word of recognition: His contribution to Gold-Rush during its initial decade in the 1970s was paramount to its very existence.

There are those whose contributions to Gold-Rush Charlie’s career and to the modern history of the Golden Retriever breed are incalculable: Janet Bunce, Joan Tudor, Mrs. Robert V. Clark, Jr., Betty Trainor and Bill Trainor, and Gerry B. Schnelle, VMD.

So many others, including friends who have passed on, have contributed each in their own way over the years, and have offered support at strategic times. From the bottom of my heart I shall be etern-
nally grateful to them as well as to the many associates and helpers who through the years have been so important to our success. And to all my dear personal friends and family, who gave me unconditional love, encouragement, affection, and much needed support during the difficult times of my life, I give you my undying love in return.

I’m particularly grateful to the members of the Garden State Golden Retriever Club and Golden Retriever Club of Western New York for their courage in standing up in the best interests of the breed.

A special thanks to Jim Plastine who has worked for Gold-Rush since the age of fourteen and more recently as a college student, who attended to the technical details of composition and format.

I shall be forever in debt to my editor and publisher, Ed Breisacher, of the Darwin Press, who launched this project, believed in its importance, encouraged me, saw every draft through its rough spots to the final phases, and designed the final production. Thank you.

My life with Golden Retrievers, I feel certain, would probably never have happened had it not been for Janet Bunce. In 1972, I was interested in purchasing a female puppy and visited many breeders. My research led me to Janet, who suggested that my husband and I come to the Long Island Golden Retriever Club Match to meet her. We took Charlie and knowing nothing about showing or having any intention of doing so, went to the match to meet her. With her help and urging, she found us a show lead and my husband, Larry, took Charlie into the ring. Charlie won, and that was the beginning of his career and of my relationship with Janet. In the days and years that followed, she not only bred her champion bitches to Charlie and finished many of the offspring, but she was in fact my mentor and source of inspiration and was also Charlie’s true mentor. This is an example of Janet’s contribution to the breed, for she has always put the good dogs she has met ahead of her own personal goals.

Last but not least, I thank Charlie, the true founder of Gold-Rush who changed my world, who guards me even today and gives me a purpose that keeps me sane, and whose constant presence is still felt everyday in my life.
Notes on Style and Content

A few words on style and content are in order to help the reader recognize what I consider some of the more important elements discussed.

My use of boldface type in the text is intended to point out useful concepts or sentences that deserve attention and re-reading as matters of the highest importance.

You will find KEY WORDS capitalized. These words relate to attitudes that may help you relate to your Golden throughout his life. In some cases, underlining of dates (for example, in the chapter on “Feeding and Nutrition”) make the time periods clearer or provide other useful items to remember.

Extensive endnotes serve as references to sources or additional information that will help with an understanding of the topic, often incorporating bibliographical references to noteworthy books for further reading. I have tried to list literature that is easily accessible to non-specialists.

In the Glossary, keywords relating specifically to the breed and to science are explained.

In the Index, I have not listed commercial products or trade names.
PART I:

Before Selecting a Puppy
Chapter 1: Choosing the Breed

A Brief Description of the Golden Retriever

To describe a Golden Retriever, I would always begin with temperament. The Golden is foremost a companion devoted to his owner-guardian, family, and indeed other animals that the Golden recognizes as part of the family. His family actually includes most of his world: the postman, the neighbors, the children at the park—all are immediately assumed by the Golden to be old friends he can’t wait to see again. It is this open, playful and loving temperament that is the embodiment of the Golden Retriever personality.

Those who own a Golden puppy are showered with love and kisses. Quickly the Golden’s energy raises the spirits of each member of the family, bringing joy and inner contentment in being loved. No one can be lonely; no one can remain depressed. Each person is inspired to become a better person and the family is thereby strengthened. The Golden’s joy for life uplifts people, making so many feel good about themselves.

The antithesis of the guard dog, Goldens have no concept of guarding. They can perceive danger when unknown sounds are heard, and they may bark and sound an alarm, but when that sound is perceived to be coming from a human being, all the signs of fear and protection immediately fade away, to be replaced by a wagging tail and a friendly greeting. There is an old joke among Golden owners that, when left to guard the house, the Golden will happily show the burglar where the silver is located.

The Golden has a high pain threshold, and is very forgiving if by chance an accident occurs and the puppy is unintentionally injured, which may sometimes happen in an active family. Though at first confused, the puppy will not understand this event as something hostile,
nor become aggressive and counterattack. On the contrary, he will demonstrate that he is the family companion, will resume his playful ways, and will be as ever giving and trusting. Whatever you want to do, your Golden will be on board.

If there was ever a canine that wants to please, it is the Golden Retriever. The round face and large eyes (as with the human infant) engender in us feelings of happiness, love, and concern. With such qualities, the Golden has much to offer: They are playful companions when we are in the mood for fun. When we are lonely or sad, they are loving companions, which heightens our sense of well-being. When we become agitated, apprehensive, or tense, they are calming companions. And they still carry out their age-old duties of alerting us to intruders approaching our homes.

There are those who do not share this love of dogs, and they are missing a great deal. They are missing an amazingly rewarding relationship between man and animal. The people who are caring guardians of a Golden Retriever can look forward to having the benefit of this special relationship. It is certainly a medical fact that the calming influence of the company of a friendly Golden Retriever reduces blood pressure and may therefore lower the risk of stroke or heart attack. The act of petting a dog has a “de-stressing” influence that is valued in today’s stressful urban life. It is my goal to increase one’s appreciation of the extraordinary end product of canine evolution that rushes up to greet you every time you open the front door.

Bred first of all to function as a working retriever, the Golden today remains one of the most trainable and eager to please of all canines, and one of the most popular breeds to share their lives with Mankind.

What to Consider before Choosing Your Puppy

Before choosing a puppy, you want to be sure that this new member of your family is suited to your lifestyle and meets your expectations and those of your family. Only then will you want to begin to investigate the puppy’s bloodlines and genetic endowment.
As a lover of Golden Retrievers, I cannot sing their praises loud enough, but that does not mean that the Golden is the perfect dog for everyone. For instance, their success as a companion means that they need companionship. Isolation is apparently as painful for them as solitary confinement is for prison inmates. Therefore, unless you have the time for a Golden, or are going to provide for these needs some other way, you should not have a Golden, at least not a young one. Older Goldens are still fun loving and wonderful, but they are more content spending hours a day sleeping until their master returns. Also, other family pets provide a degree of companionship for the Golden.

We humans tend to think that, because our Golden loves us so much, we are the only one who can fill our Golden’s need for companionship. This is not true, but the fact remains that, as our Golden’s guardian, we have a responsibility not to ignore this basic requirement.

In addition to companionship, he needs to be trained. The Golden strives to please, and nothing focuses him more than learning basic obedience and good manners. Nothing makes him happier than the praise he receives for a job well done. Untrained, his exuberance can be annoying, and any expression of anger from his trusted master is confusing and unpleasant. Therefore, the untrained dog is a two-time loser: He misses the opportunity to receive praise from his master, and his untrained behavior creates negative emotions in his owner, which in turn distresses him. Clearly, if you are to acquire a Golden, you must understand what undertaking this commitment means—to you and your Golden.

Another responsibility that comes along with a Golden is that of his care, feeding, combing, bathing, trimming, nail clipping, tending to ears and teeth, as well as frequent expensive trips to the veterinarian—all part of the package. That’s in addition to cleaning up after a Golden, because these dogs have lots of hair, and the daily contribution to the disarray of the house is considerable.

Furthermore, the sheer size of a mature Golden must be considered. The wagging tail can play havoc to any coffee table arrangement. Windows and doors will never be the same again due to the footprints and nose prints galore.

On the other hand, once a Golden steals your heart, you will...
never be the same again. Hair and footprints are minor annoyances. To have a friend who loves you above all else . . . who will go with you anywhere, anytime, with pure enjoyment in his heart, will make your life more worthwhile. You'll find you are planning your vacation not only to include him but choosing places he will enjoy. Even your choice of the car and house you buy will be made with your beloved Golden in mind. And when he dies your grief will be immense. Only to be placated by the acquisition of your next Golden.

Although the breed is considered to be dual purpose (that is, field/companion), there are variations in the way a Golden looks as well as variations in personality and in traits such as intelligence, birdiness, energy level, and retrieving ability. Because the Golden Retriever is a very versatile and intelligent creature, the breed serves well in rescue work, as a guide dog to the blind, as a narcotics-detection dog, as a therapy dog, in rescue work, and as a noble companion; he is also well suited for agility, obedience, field work, and the show ring—to name some of his most important endeavors.

Male vs. Female

Many people ask me whether they should buy a male or a female. The answer really lies within one’s expectations. There are, of course, gender differences. Most of these differences center around the presence of the hormone testosterone. In general the male is larger and generally weighs about 15 pounds more than the female. Because of his testosterone levels, he develops secondary sex characteristics after adolescence: His head becomes broader primarily due to the growth of the frontal, temporal, and masseter muscles on either side of the skull; he has a more pronounced “stop”; he develops a longer coat and a greater ruff (the coat on the chest); and he has a greater amount of musculature in general and is taller than the female.

There are a number of personality characteristics that are also peculiar to the male. The male seems to worship the pack leader; he is concerned with his master’s moods and feelings. This behavior may be derived from the position of males within the ancestral pack, where the
Choosing the Breed
pack leader is of utmost importance in the hierarchy of the males and the survival of the group. On the other hand, if the male is neutered, the physical and behavioral differences between male and female are minimized. (More about “Neutering the Male” in Chapter 17, pp. 178–79.)

The female is smaller, of course, than the male. The female is devoted, affectionate, even needy, and may come across as more submissive. Somewhat less worshipful of her master, she may be seen to have greater drives to meet her own needs for food and shelter, perhaps historically from the need to provide for her offspring.

The fact that the female will come into heat twice a year is an annoying problem. The estrus cycle lasts 21 days, during which time she must be kept under lock and key due to her attractiveness to male dogs in the neighborhood and her own natural desire to escape and roam in order to attract even more males. In addition there is a bloody discharge, which also produces an unpleasant odor. (More about “Spaying the Female” in Chapter 17, pp. 179–80.) I feel that the female is harder to housebreak probably because submissive urination is part of, and quite normal to, the young female personality. Also, the immature female is more prone to cystitis because of her short urethra and the low levels of the estrogen hormone, which are present until maturity. (More about “Cystitis” in Chapter 15, pp. 140–42.)

Some people prefer males because they are larger and more magnificent, but their weight and size makes them harder to handle. Other people prefer females just because they are smaller. Until he is neutered, the male may hump children or dogs as a show of his dominance, and even challenge strange males, although many males do not demonstrate these traits.

Both males and females can be aggressive with strange dogs if they are not correctly socialized early on with other dogs. It is the responsibility of the human caretaker to supervise and control a Golden’s behavior when he is interacting with other dogs. The Golden has the ability to identify fully with his human family to the point of thinking of other dogs as foreign creatures. Good management can minimize many of the negatives of both sexes mentioned above. Owners need to recognize the physical and behavioral differences in making their choices.
Goldens, Children, and the Family

Golden Retrievers have an innate love for children. I remember well my Ch. Cummings’ Gold-Rush Charlie who held all the breed records for twenty years. In the early seventies, he was the number one Sporting Dog (and still the only Golden so ranked) and was known for his sparkling personality in the show ring. The reason for his marvelous showmanship was that Charlie especially loved children. He would study the gallery until he saw a child; then he would focus entirely on the child and spontaneously wag his tail. The gallery loved it.

The Macha family with their two Goldens

The Golden Retriever is one of the most popular dogs for families. The adult’s patient and gentle nature, intelligence, willingness to please, and playfulness have justly given the breed the reputation as an ideal companion for children. Goldens are social animals, and can bond to all members of the family, including other pets. Goldens, especially puppies, will view young children as playmates. A puppy has sharp teeth and nails and cannot resist treating children to its own “play”
behavior, which includes nipping, jumping, barking, chasing, and even growling. This behavior can frighten a toddler, who will often re-act by screaming and running away. Thus, a bad cycle can develop because a puppy will see the child’s behavior as an invitation to play. To avoid this, parents must monitor the play of children with the puppy and not allow rough-housing, chasing, wrestling, and the like. Young children should be protected, as the puppy also must be protected. Older children should be coached in short periods of calm play with the puppy, while adult members of the family can train the puppy and take on the feeding and grooming duties.

Because the adult dog is a large, strong, enthusiastic creature, training must be initiated while the Golden is young and manageable. Care and training are activities that will develop a close bond between the Golden and family members and foster the desired behavior.