

# AMERICAN AIREDALE

**2024 AKC NATIONAL OBEDIENCE CHAMPIONSHIP  
(NOC) WILMINGTON, OHIO**



**#4 TERRIER**

**FYREBRICK SPACE ODDITY EXPLORES  
VCD2 UDX OM1 BN VER AX AXJ**

**"Laika"**

**#1 TERRIER**

**PIPESTONES FINETANNED LEATHER UDX  
PCD OM2 BN VER SHA JHR**

**"Tanner"**

**FIRST PLACE  
FOURTH PLACE  
TERRIER GROUP  
2024 AKC National Obedience  
Championship JULY 20-21  
Wilmington, Ohio**

@PixnPages Photography

**Owner: Mary Barker  
Breeder: Rhae Drijber**

**Owned by Anita Smits / Scott Lichty,  
Breeder: Mary Schuster  
Handled by Anita Smits**



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[www.airedale.org](http://www.airedale.org)

# Dreams Take Work

by Mary Barker

**Coffee and dreams go together!** It was a cool fall morning drinking coffee and watching my little Airedale puppy play “bitey-face” with her older Airedale brother. Dreams started forming in my mind as I watched... What kinds of training would she enjoy? Could she handle the stress of the show ring and all the adventures that come with that lifestyle? Could she be a Versatile Companion Dog (VCD) or National Obedience Championship (NOC) contender? Time would tell I figured!!

Flash forward 8 years later....

It was another cool morning but this morning had a buzz in the air! We were at the Roberts Center, Wilmington, Ohio.... site for the 2024 National Obedience Championship (NOC). The dream was coming true!!!

Looking back, the journey wasn't a slam dunk to get that coveted invitation to compete at the NOC. The dream took work!! We trained “something” 6 days/week for 8 years... whether an obedience or agility class, a few hours at the park, tracking outside in the fields, or while sitting in my LazyBoy watching TV... little sessions, long sessions, planning sessions, journaling, dreaming... The dream was always to get to the NOC. Dreams take work and they happen by baby steps everyday... it was always fun being with Laika so training was never a chore.

Not only did we train all the exercises... that was the easy part... We also trained focus, attention, endurance, attitude, effort and desire to work. It was all business for Laika and she was a rock star at training.

Fyrebrick Space Oddity Explores VCD2 UDX OM1 BN VER AX AXJ.... Laika to me... was bred by Rhae and Cary Drijber. I'm so grateful for this breeding and their great love for their puppies.



*“Not only did we train all the exercises... that was the easy part”*

There were bumps along the way too, frustrating and challenging for sure....COVID hit and everything shut down for two years so we trained in the basement and backyard, my obedience coach got very sick and passed away so I had to find a new approach, my first heeling method caused Laika to lose confidence so I had to go back and retrain her heeling, and that very pesky thing called a job got super demanding. But we muddled through using the baby steps method and it all worked out.

Laika was the #2 obedience Airedale in the nation last year and we finished as the 4th place Terrier at the NOC.

Her first two rings were perfection and then she dropped two exercises in the third ring and got rattled. I helped her get back focused and confident and she finished the last 5 rings with perfection also... I'm proud of her recovery the most! Out of 24 exercises, she only dropped 2 exercises... with a score of 639.5 points, she was only 28 points out of first place terrier. My dream for Laika had come true!!

I'm very grateful to my caddy, Victoria Blais... my sister. She kept me focused, calm and hydrated and her support and encouragement grounded me. Also thanks to all my coaches along the way, particularly Kori Bevis, our obedience coach. And many thanks to my training partner, Anita Smits.  
***No journey is walked alone; it takes courage to ask for help along the way.***



# THE ROAD TO THE AKC NATIONAL OBEDIENCE CHAMPIONSHIP

By Anita Smits



I didn't know it then, but 30 plus years ago was the start of the "road" to the AKC National Obedience Championship (NOC). At that time, I would have called it bush whacking on a little path in heavy woods. Scott (Lichty) and I were married in 1993 and shortly after that, we got our first heart dog Airedale, Max. At my first AKC obedience competition with Max in Novice A, we squeaked by with a passing score to earn our first leg and the following performance scores were not

much better to earn our title. Amazingly I was not deterred. The training process and relationship that developed with my dog was addictive.

The years passed and Scott and I continued our love of Airedales (Max, Maggie, Rosie, Annie) and I learned more about obedience training and competition. In 2011, I flew down to watch the AKC NOC in Orlando, Florida. I was very impressed by the focus and precision of these teams. Most of the teams were Golden Retrievers,



Border Collies and Shelties that were performing at this elite level. Also, within our own Airedale community, I had learned of Airedale competitors like Mary Law and Spice (1<sup>st</sup> Airedale OTCH – Obedience Trial Champion) and Suzanne Tharpe, Alice Peterson, Ed Basham who inspired me as well.

The first day of the two-day AKC NOC event starts with an all-breed invitational where the 150 invites are based on the number of OTCH (Obedience Trial Championship) points that the dog/handler team have earned over the qualifying year period. The 150 invitees are determined both by OTCH points earned and a percentage

allocation by breed. In the first day of competition, the 150 dogs/handlers are divided into eight groups representing the eight rings. They will rotate through all eight rings executing three different Open and Utility exercises per ring for a total of 24 exercises (740 possible points). At the end of the first day, only the top 50 dogs are determined strictly on points. In addition, on the first day, they award the top four placements by breed Group (Terrier, Hound, Working, Toy etc.).

On the second day, only the top 50 will compete in another two rounds of performances with scoring starting all over again and ultimately the NOC Champion is crowned.

By 2011, I had trained our Airedale Bob to my first Utility title (UD). I don't remember if I was presumptuous even to think of having a goal of showing at the AKC NOC, but I loved the obedience training process and the relationship that was built with my dog. My obedience lessons continued with my trainer Lois Ornat who became my good friend. In time, competing at the AKC NOC became a "bucket list" goal for me. The road had become clearer.

Eight years later, in 2019, with Lois's continued training guidance, she supported my "bucket list" goal and she coached me at the Tulsa, Oklahoma AKC NOC with our Airedale Jasmine. It was a wonderful experience to be there and compete. Jasmine was such a good girl, and I was so proud of her. I was forever grateful to Lois for helping me achieve this goal and having my first AKC NOC experience. This was a major milestone on the road and I wanted to do it again.



Four years later, my dear friend Lois passed away in December 2023. I miss her friendship dearly as so many others do in the Obedience community. However, she left me with a strong training foundation and a continued passion for competition. In January 2024, I retired, and I was able to focus 100% on training and preparation for the next AKC NOC with our Airedale Tanner. In the last six months, I turned to my training partners Ann Husa and Mary Barker (another Airedale owner going to the AKC NOC!) along with the incredibly good fortune to be able to attend classes at Tails Up Dog Training with multiple NOC champion, Kori Bevis. With Lois's foundation and these training friends, Tanner and I trained like we had never trained before to prepare for the July 2024 AKC NOC. With that said, anyone who has been in a competitive sport and competed at higher levels knows that the success comes from not only from those "last 6 months" but from the road that was laid in all those previous years. All the effort, learnings, failures, successes, emotional management and persistence that have paved the way.

On Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at the AKC NOC, I was so proud of my buddy, Tanner (Pipestone's Fine Tanned

Leather UDX PCD OM2 BN VER SHA JHR). He represents the best in the versatility of the Airedale breed. My husband (Scott Lichty) trains him in the hunting venues and Tanner has an AKC Senior Upland title and an AKC Junior Retriever title along with this Obedience titles that I do. As far as the NOC, as described earlier, Tanner had to execute 24 exercises in eight rings during an 8-hour period in an environment that is beyond distracting. He was focused and worked with me the entire day. He completed 22 of the exercises with minor deductions with a 90% passing rate. To put it in perspective, in this elite competition, a 94% passing rate would have been required to qualify for the next day's Top 50 competition! It was an incredible experience once again.

While we did not make it to the Top 50, his scores were good enough to earn him 1st Place in the Terrier Group! And, to put icing on the cake, my training partner, Mary Barker and her Airedale, Laika placed 4<sup>th</sup> in the Terrier Group. It was fantastic to have two Airedales in the Terrier Group placements!

A big thank you to my husband, Scott Lichty who was assistant "extraordinaire" during the AKC NOC as we moved from ring to ring. You were amazing! And of course, a thank you to breeder Mary Schuster/Pipestone whom without our breeders, we could not enjoy the dogs we love so much.

In looking at the 30 plus year road we have navigated to the AKC NOC, it has been full of wonderful dogs, people, relationships, successes and challenges. If it was easy, it would not have been worthwhile.



I feel very grateful that I can look ahead and still aspire to the next stop on the "road" and that is next year's 2025 AKC NOC with the goal of making it to the next day's Top 50! In the meantime, the most important goal is to savor every day and enjoy the present moment with family, friends and our Airedales. My best wishes to all of you as well to enjoy your "roads" wherever they might take you!

**PIPESTONES FINE TANNED LEATHER UDX PCD OM2 BN VER SHA JHR  
2024 AKC National Obedience Championship (NOC) – Wilmington, OHIO  
Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - 1<sup>st</sup> in Terrier Group  
Owned by Anita Smits / Scott Lichty, Handled by Anita Smits**