



Trivial and Not-So-Trivial Quirks of the American Water Spaniel

1. The AWS is a primitive breed, not ruined beyond their natural instincts. They are very hardy dogs, and close to their self-sufficient beginnings as market hunters' dogs. They will roll in the most disgusting things and have been known to eat anything that does not eat them first. Most AWS can survive such binges without the digestive distress that would affect other (lesser) breeds.
2. The AWS are very stoic, with a high tolerance for pain. Watch your dogs closely for signs of injury after a day afield, as they may not indicate that they have been gashed open by barbed wire, pulled out a toenail, strained a muscle, etc.
3. The AWS needs someone to be alpha! They are opportunists (see #1) and if given an inch, they will take a mile. Be the leader and be firm with your AWS, or they will take over your household.
4. The AWS is very intelligent and has a strong, innate sense of fair play. Remember this when training and setting down the rules of the house. They will not forgive being corrected harshly without knowing the offense. They will bore easily and therefore do not take to nonstop drilling or excessively repetitive training methods. They will quit on you if you offend their sense of fair play.
5. AWS are always hungry. This does not mean that they need to always be eating, and overfeeding can happen quite easily. Their eyes will tell you they are starving, but you should not believe them! Remember, maintaining a healthy weight on your dog will add years to his life. Our health guarantee also requires it.
6. If your AWS does not eat, rush him to the vet! In most cases, passing up a meal is indicative of a very sick AWS. AWS are extremely food drive (see #1) and few will even slow enough to chew their food.
7. As with all spaniels, keep the hair short in front of the ear canal (by trimming or shaving) to allow airflow. This can help reduce ear infections. A drop of alcohol in the ear canal after a day of swimming can also prevent infection from the water in the ear canal.
8. The AWS will tolerate cold temperatures better than heat. Their subcutaneous fat layer is thicker than most breeds, and they have a double coat to insulate them from extreme temperatures. In the summer, you are better to remove undercoat with a slicker brush, furminator, coat king, etc than to shave them down.
9. Similarly, their skin is often sensitive to shampoos and sprays. We have found a natural oatmeal shampoo works great. We also recommend Espana Silk Medicated Shampoo, Conditioner, and topical spray for treatment of sores or hot spots.
10. AWS are not above self-mutilation. Watch them carefully if they start to develop a habit of licking their feet or tail. This could be a sign of boredom or stress and often turns into chewing. Especially watch for reactions to sutures or surgical scrub after surgery. It is common for AWS to require an e-collar post-surgery to prevent unwanted worrying to the area.
11. AWS love to chew on bones, sticks, etc. (watch out for chewing on rocks!!) Smoked bones and rawhides are great (as long as they are safely made, ideally not from China) but beware, if the bone has flavoring it will get on their ears, and they will chew their ears to make sure they get every last drop!
12. As with all dogs, crate training is the preferred method of housebreaking. They will learn to love their crate and have already spent a great deal of time sleeping in one as a litter. Their crate will be their own place to retire to when they need solace from the craziness of our lives.
13. Most AWS are not comfortable with added blankets and padding, as they will overheat. Don't be offended if they won't sleep in bed with you for similar reasons. Most AWS will destroy bedding given to them inside their crate, so we recommend using old towels during the training process and progress from there at your discretion.