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Regional
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Health
Department
Scores

Sports

Local
UT
Outdoors
Auto Racing
Local Columnists

Lifestyles

Local Features
Local Columnists
Local Events
Entertainment
Food
Faith

Opinion

Editorials
Columnists
Letters to the Editor

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Rescued Weimaraner shows talent for dock dog diving, retrieval

by GAIL CRUTCHFIELD

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year old at the time.

Alex was brought to Wolf Creek from a shelter in Elizabethton. He was emaciated and the staff at Wolf Creek went to work putting some weight on the animal.

Steele found Alex after searching for a new dog.

"I lost my dog Spencer," Steele said. The Rottweiler Steele owned for the dog's entire 13 years of life passed away.

Steele began searching for another pet and looked around, visiting shelters and meeting a couple of other dogs.

"But they didn't work out," he said. They just didn't click.

The click came, however, when Steele met Alex at the Wolf Creek Weimaraner Rescue facility in Kingsport.

Was it love at first sight?

"Yeah, it actually was," Steele said. "He's my boy. I love him to death. I'd do anything for that dog."

But like all relationships, it took some time to adjust.

First, there was Alex's health to deal with.

"He was very skinny," Steele said. He worked on continuing the process the staff at Wolf Creek started in fattening the dog up.

Now Alex goes through a \$52 bag of high protein dog food each month, most of the calories from which he blows through with all of the activity he requires.

Weimaraners, as a breed, Steele said need a lot of exercise, otherwise the owner — mostly his belongings — may bear the wrath of the understimulated animal.

"I think he needs Ritalin sometimes," Steele joked as Alex dropped the tennis ball at his feet. "If he doesn't get enough exercise, he can start tearing into stuff."

But if he provides Alex with enough exercise time, that runs a lot of the dog's energy down so he's not chewing on shoes, boxes or other items left in easy reach.

Steele, a training manager for McAllister's Deli, said he can spend anywhere from an hour to three hours throwing the ball for Alex. He has a long tool he uses to make the ball go further.

"That's all he loves to do is chase the ball," Steele said.

Alex also likes to jump after balls thrown into water, but before he learned to like that, he had to learn how to swim.

Alex's body vibrates with unleashed excitement. His eyes remain intently focused on the prize that awaits him. With a flick of the wrist he's off at the speed of light.

The routine is repeated over and over as Alex's owner, Trent Steele of Seymour, throws a tennis ball for his 20-month-old blue Weimaraner Alex. The 20 months is an estimate. Steele, 34, rescued the canine about eight months ago from the Wolf Creek Weimaraner Rescue. They guessed Alex was about a

"He didn't know how to swim," Steele said.

"When I first got him I took him to a park with a pond," he said. Alex would get into the water but didn't do all that well at first.

"He would just high paddle," Steele said. Then he saw other dogs jumping into the water from docks and followed suit. Soon he was jumping further than many of the other dogs.

Steele began entering Alex in dock dog diving events. He's won first and second place awards in several events in the amateur categories. He's also won awards in retrieving events.

At a recent Buckeye DockDogs event in Dayton, Ohio, Alex came away with first place in the Big Air competition with a jump of 21 feet 7 inches. He earned second place in the Speed Retrieve competition with a time of 6.675 seconds.

Steele is working to help organize a club for owners and fans of Weimaraners, called Smokey Mountain Weimaraners. They will be part of a March 13 fundraiser in Knoxville called the Weim and Cheese event.

For more information about the Smokey Mountain Weimaraners, you may call Steele at 437-6377 or e-mail him at smdockdogs@gmail.com.

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