



Shannon Honi and her Airedale, Vesper, celebrate a RATN title earned at a recent Sheboygan Falls barn hunt. *Photo by Christine Thomas*



## FROM THE LITTLE CABIN IN THE WOODS

By Christine Thomas

"I think duct tape could solve all your problems," my husband, Stan, offered helpfully (not).

This sage advice was given as we were on our way to Sheboygan Falls to the Oh Rats Dog Training Center to participate in our first barn hunt trial. Readers will remember that my last column focused on introducing my Airedale, Major, and daughter, Shannon Honi's Airedale, Vesper, to the game of barn hunt. Dogs can win pretty ribbons for finding rats in PVC tubes that are buried in straw. Collecting three pretty ribbons result in a RATN (rat novice) title for your dog.

The last column ended with me worried about peeing in the ring (Major), swearing in the ring (me), and me scruffing my dog. Scruffing is the act of curling your fingers around any part of the dog's anatomy.

Apparently, the farm boy in Stan, who believes that duct tape can fix anything, thought that taping my mouth shut, taping my fingers together, and affixing duct tape to the part of Major that pee comes out of, would keep us from committing the three deadly cardinal sins of a barn hunt: peeing, swearing, and scruffing. That level of sin results in an NQ (not qualified) and no ribbon is awarded.



Christine Thomas's Airedale, Major, in the rat hunt winner's circle, but not without some trials and tribulations first. *Photo by Christine Thomas*

While this advice might have worked, one of the other rules in the massive rule book that governs barn hunt is that the dog must "run naked." No collars, or any other thing that is not actually part of the dog's anatomy, can be on the dog. I think that precludes duct tape.

We arrived at the training center early. This gave me plenty of time to walk Major around the grounds. Lots of dogs had already walked around the grounds. This meant that Major felt compelled to pee a great deal to cover up all those other scents. He must have peed gallons. There could not be one more drop. Could there?

Three of my Airedale owner friends were there. Sue Zimmer, of Pewaukee, was there with her dogs, Buckwheat and Chipper. Lin Hartnett, of Rolling Meadows, Ill., brought her young puppy Pari, and Sandi Cooley, of Grafton, the grand dame of hunting Airedales, brought her female Surrey. Shannon showed up with Vesper for Saturday and Sunday. So, there was a nice Airedale cheering section on site.



Christine Thomas is ready to release Major for a rat hunt run. **Contributed photo**

Major was in the first set of novice dogs to run on Friday morning. He was first up in his blind full of dogs. They put the handlers and dogs in a blind so they cannot see where the rats are hidden. I was SO NERVOUS. I walked Major into the pen with the straw bales. He needed to find the rat and alert me so that I could call "RAT" to tell the judge I thought he found it. He was required to go through a tunnel and climb up on a bale. I had to collar him at the end and remove him from the ring.

"I am ready when you are," the judge informed me as we moved onto the starting pad.

Major was shaking with excitement. He hunted well. I told him to climb a bale. The rat was there, and he peed on the rat tube. We were NQ'd. I left the ring in disgrace, while the ring was sanitized, and the soiled bale was removed. My Airedale cheering section was sympathetic. I was disgusted with my dog.

The second run was perfect.

He did everything according to Hoyle. And he was high- inclass, which means he ran a faster time than any other dog in the novice competition in the second trial. We got a big, beautiful ribbon and Major had his first qualifying run. Team Airedale was ecstatic. Maybe we could do this. I chattered on at dinner that night about how wonderful my dog was.

Shannon and Vesper showed up on Saturday. Shannon is not as competitive as I am. And she is not trying to get the coveted Airedale Terrier Club of America Platinum Versatile Award. Major just needed two more qualifying runs to achieve that honor.

Another Airedale showed up on Saturday. Lynette Lessard, of Somers, just needed one good run from her female, Saylor, to get her senior title. She accomplished that goal.

"Are you the lady who writes for the *Wisconsin Outdoor News*," she asked. "My husband reads your articles and tells me whenever your Airedale is in there."

Great! More pressure.

Major was disqualified on both runs on Saturday. The first run was super painful. He qualified in record time, but would not recall. On the second time around the ring, while evading capture, he peed on a bale. We went from the second ribbon to no ribbon at all, in the blink of a leg lift. More disgrace. Not only did he pee, but he defied my commands. He did not want to stop hunting. In the field, his correction collar would have reminded him that he was not in charge. You do not even have to turn it on. In the rat ring, running naked, he well ... ran naked. When he peed in the second run of the day, I was despondent.

Meanwhile, Vesper qualified on her second run. It was picture perfect. She was so obedient. She hunted methodically, tunneled and climbed on command and met Shannon at the gate to be collared. It was great. Redemption for the little cabin crew.

Sunday was a mixed bag.

Vesper qualified on both runs. She is now Timberwyk Vesper Shaken Not Stirred RATN. I am proud and envious. Lin Hartnett and Pari also captured a big ribbon for achieving RATN.

Major peed on the first Sunday run. I considered pulling him from the second run.

Shannon reminded me of that famous Teddy Roosevelt quote about the man in the arena: "*The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again.*" (Quote shortened to save space).

Roosevelt owned an Airedale.

So, I took Major in one last time. He did the hunting, climbing, and tunneling perfectly, but would not recall. It was triumphant and embarrassing. I managed to corner him in the straw.

I had my arms wrapped around him and tried to buckle his collar, with my fingers spread wide so the judge could see that I was not scruffing. I got my sweater tangled in the workings of his collar. It was hard to manage the squirming dog, the collar, and the detangling, all at the same time.

The clock was ticking. I apologized to everyone. I was shaking. I wanted to cry. However, I got the job done. We qualified. No scruffing, no swearing, no peeing.

It was not pretty. We got that second ribbon.

Two questions remain.

Will I go back to get that last ribbon that takes us to RATN and Airedale Platinum Versatile?

Do I have the courage to be woman in the arena?

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