

# Reveille “First Lady of Aggieland”

Reveille is a female sable and white rough coated collie who is the official mascot of Texas A&M University, located in College Station, Texas. Juell Collies is the first kennel to provide more than one collie to serve as Reveille, which puts us in a unique position to illuminate the selection experience for choosing the First Lady of Aggieland.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine for a moment you are a young college student at a major university with an active social life, with just one catch, no matter where you go your collie goes with you, no exceptions. You go to class, your collie goes with you. You go on a date, your collie goes with you. No business in College Station would stop your collie from coming in. You are in the Corps of Cadets, and oh-by-the-way, your collie out ranks you, by a lot. You have a Twitter account with your followers; so does your collie, but she has 42.9 thousand plus followers. She has a student ID and a personal cell phone. One bark in class and class is dismissed. When she in the end passes over the Rainbow Bridge, she is given a formal military funeral including a 21-gun salute and buried outside the north end of Kyle Field, where they have a scoreboard built specifically over the grave sites, so the past Reveilles will know the football score of their beloved Aggies.

Texas A&M is a university steeped in traditions that they take very seriously. Since 1931 one of those traditions has been a dog serving as their official mascot. Beginning with Reveille III, she became and remains today a full-blood rough collie. Unlike the other 127 colleges with dogs as their mascots, there is only one at a time, and she lives with a student on campus.

It takes a very special and unique collie to successfully serve as Reveille. As exhibitors, we are sensitive to dog crates banging as our dog is in the ring, not wanting them to be disturbed. Reveille, has to be able to handle 100,000 screaming fans, and canon fire. On a home game day she will pose for several hundred photographs that will hit social media, where she has to look attentive. In comparison, we worry about getting good ears in the show ring under much more ideal circumstances. Oh, and no tugging on the lead, she has to march during the parade and into the stadium on game day with a loose lead. When walking to class she cannot be concerned with bikes, skateboards, or squirrels. In today’s social media cell phone camera driven society, she is always in the public view whenever she leaves her room.

This is a lot for a dog, especially a breed known for its sensitivity to take on. This is why it is so critical for Texas A&M to select the right collie. Reveille provides a national showcase for the traditional sable and white rough collie. The youngest generation is barely aware of Lassie, much less Lad The Dog. Outside of the collie breeder community, who knows who the last national champion was? However, 43.9 thousand plus of her Twitter followers know Reveille. She provides an opportunity to serve as a shining example of the breed, encouraging others to seek out collies to continue their long tradition as an excellent family dog.

Working with Texas A&M requires a varied set of skills in addition to those of established collie breeders. The president of the university is running a very large corporation that has a military division who is responsible for the live mascot. The veterinarian school is also heavily involved as expected given their involvement in canine genetic research. As breed specific preservation breeders we are getting much more involved in understanding and testing the genetic patterns as they relate to collies. However, our backgrounds in corporate America and my military background, proved essential in understanding how to speak to the needs important to each

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<sup>1</sup> In full disclosure, Reveille VIII was the puppy we received for whelping the litter for Steve and Lisa Finken, of Tapestry Collies. We were the owners, but not the breeders of record for Reveille VIII. We are the breeders and owners of record for Reveille X.

group. The ability to anticipate their requirements and speak to them in their language provided an essential advantage in both the selection of Reveille VIII and X.

The first time through with Reveille VIII started a whirlwind of activity and emotions as it was already July and the selection needed to be completed by early August. During that time Texas A&M flew in veterinarians and animal behavior specialists to evaluate our candidate, our kennel, and to an extent ourselves.

Nothing however, prepared us for what was to come when we drove down to Texas A&M with our collie. Once we arrived in College Station, we were told not to get out of the car and were escorted directly to a house on campus and into the garage. Except it was not just a house, it was the President's mansion, and we were given unlimited access to the house as she had not moved in yet. The three days we were on site was a blur of people from Texas A&M that came to evaluate her. She was gone for most of one day while the vet school took her for their own evaluation. This was followed by an intense evaluation by animal behavior specialists. We met with the President of Texas A&M, the General in charge of the Corps of Cadets, the head of the vet school, various other senior members of key departments, and last but not least key members of Company E-2 who are responsible for the care of Reveille.

Imagine for a minute the requirements for a championship changed to include veterinarian examination, obedience, confirmation, and an oral exam where the judges get to ask you questions. Oh and the obedience testing is done by someone you have never met handling your dog with bicycles and skateboards going by during the evaluation.

I expect before Reveille XI is selected DNA testing will become a requirement. This sounds like a lot, but if you look at it from their viewpoint, they are committing to a dog that will spend its life in the public eye. While collies are not known for biting, they have a two bite law in Texas, where the dog has to be put down if it is proven it has bitten more than once. They don't have a kennel of Reveilles to pull from, they have one dog. If anything happens to her, they have a big problem as they cannot go without a collie serving as Reveille even for a short time.

Our involvement in Reveille VIII selection was very different with Reveille IX and X. We were contacted when they were looking at retiring Reveille VIII, but at the time our focus was on blue merles and we did not have any sable and white options for them. Instead we provided a list of reputable collie breeders, one of which was Overland Collies belonging to Mike and Marcy Fine. Overland Turning Twix was selected to serve as a very successful Reveille IX. When it came to selecting Reveille X we were prepared from the beginning. We had a very good understanding of their requirements and had an established relationship. We selected a puppy from the litter and trained her from the beginning to handle the expected requirements. We were also prepared to stop the process if she showed us any reason along the way she should not be the one we presented as a candidate.

When our candidate for Reveille X was about three months old, we received a list of behaviors from Texas A&M they were requiring. This was also given to the other breeders participating in the candidate process. We had about a year to work on training and prepare her for her evaluation. During that time we kept in touch mostly by email which included sending a video of her progress. It should be noted that COVID-19 struck and the world stopped right when we wanted to expand her training away from home. This was both good and bad. The good was we were retired and had time to focus on the training. The bad was we were severely limited on our options for temperament testing away from our house. Fortunately, we knew what of the 79 listed behaviors were critical to her success and we focused on them. We also live next to a public lake with a very wide paved walking path, that had a lot of bikes and outdoor activity as it provided a safe socially distancing outdoor location for people during COVID. While we could

not replicate game day activities for her, we could replicate daily campus activity with walks around the lake.

We were also lucky with the late fall weather in 2020, as this allowed their visit in early November to be held outside while socially distancing. Texas A&M flew in approximately eight people from the various groups responsible for selecting the next candidate. We spent a couple of hours socializing safely while we served them a nice Kansas BBQ brisket lunch. During this time Rev was off lead to show her ability to behave in large groups where food is available. They were able to observe her ability to handle the requested behaviors even while our cats were inserting themselves into the process. They also took her on their own to walk around the lake to observe her reaction to other people, bikes, and so forth just as she would going to class on campus. It was about a month later they called us to let us know our candidate was selected to serve as Reveille X.

One thing we are proud of is our ability to negotiate a significant donation to the Collie Health Foundation for both Reveille VIII and Reveille X in place of personal compensation. It gets to the root of why we strive to provide a collie to Texas A&M as their mascot. We feel it is important to give up a legitimate part of our breeding program in order to insure the public face of collies at Texas A&M is one that drives people to appreciate what a collie represents. It is a sacrifice, one that we gladly accept. While accolades as breeders are important, the preservation of the breed itself takes precedence.