



And the winner is...



Maly!

Justine Harding reveals the story behind an extraordinary dog – our 'Golden Oldie' of 2009.

When the 'Goldie Oldie' competition was created, the aim was to recognise older dogs' achievements, and owners who helped their dogs continue to fulfil their potential. While all our shortlisted dogs were worthy of recognition, one stood out as summing up what our 'Golden Oldie' award was all about — 15-year-old Maly.

Owned by Charlotte Kasner, from Chiswick, London, Collie X German Shepherd Maly has only begun to live life to the full since the age of 11. And despite having significant hurdles to overcome, Maly hasn't looked back, continuing to prove that older dogs can achieve amazing things and give so much.

Fantastic achievement

Vet nurse Charlotte was delighted at Maly's win: "I first found out by email while I was in the middle of surgery, so I had to behave. But as soon as the last client left I ran around the room madly! Then I nearly wore the phone out calling people to tell them of Maly's success," she said. She admitted to having been on tenterhooks ever since opening Your Dog Magazine and finding him shortlisted for the top title. She said: "I was so proud to see him pictured — the pages fell off their staples as I showed so many clients the article. Ever since I have pounced on each issue to see who would be the winner.

"It is such a fantastic achievement for Maly — I almost have to pinch myself as he has come so far. It's incredible. And he was up against such stiff competition. This just confirms all the good things



Maly is nearly 16 and still going strong.



Our winner and his owner Charlotte.



Maly has achieved so much in the past few years.



Maly jumps for joy at winning this award!

clear the situation had deteriorated for all concerned. Sadly three years later the lady died, and just after the funeral Maly moved in with Charlotte. "It wouldn't have happened if my friend hadn't died," admitted Charlotte.

Maly, aged 11, was terrified of people, and nervous and aggressive with other dogs. He had barely been on a lead and was too scared to eat

from a bowl — Charlotte hand-fed him for a year. He also had a number of obsessions including sexual behaviours and chewing. "He would often manage to collect five or six balls on a walk and woe betide you if they didn't all come home," recalled Charlotte. "He would then hide under the table and chew and chew and chew to the

point he wore away all his teeth." In addition, he had bonded closely with Charlotte and suffered from severe separation anxiety.

Charlotte worked steadily with Maly to build up his confidence and his experiences so things gradually became less scary for him.

Private victories

At the age of 13, Maly had improved enough to have a go at showing. "I thought this would be a good way to advance his socialisation and get him used to being handled by different people, meet different dogs, and to have fun," explained Charlotte. The pair travelled to each show by public transport, giving Maly further lessons in life. Improvements were obvious to Charlotte with each outing — Maly might accept a bit more attention from a judge or cope better with being in close proximity to another dog. There were many private victories before any

I know about him but it is wonderful to have it recognised from the outside."

But Charlotte's relationship with Maly is bittersweet. Charlotte first came across him when she worked for a lady who owned Maly's father — he had sired pups at the age of 19 and lived to 21. The lady had kept Maly although Charlotte can remember being decidedly underwhelmed. "I couldn't understand why she had chosen to keep that pup — I wasn't impressed," she said. Charlotte often helped to exercise the dog but was unaware initially of the underlying tensions in her employer's household — the lady's partner was abusive both to her and the dog. "I'm not sure when my feelings towards Maly changed but once I realised the problems I pleaded to have him, but couldn't," Charlotte said. Not long after, the lady and her partner moved taking Maly with them. By this time a friendship had developed and Charlotte stayed in touch. It was



Maly and Charlotte have been on an emotional journey together.



public ones, but when Maly won his first rosette the pair were thrilled. From then on placings in trick, handler, obedience, and veteran classes followed, resulting in a wall of rosettes. "Deciding to show him was the best thing I could have done to help him," said Charlotte, "but I'm a terrible pot-hunter now!"

Next, it was time to have a go at agility. Once again, not only did Maly overcome his personal fears, but he excelled, taking second place to a dog half his age in an open class of 30 dogs.

Due to Maly's needs Charlotte changed her lifestyle completely, switching careers to avoid working long hours, opting instead for jobs with shorter shifts or where Maly could come too. She also returned to working with horses, as a volunteer teacher for the Riding for the Disabled Association, and Maly took up the role of unofficial PAT dog, adding an often calming and gentle influence at the pony centre.

"It's hard — lots of people think I'm insane," said Charlotte, "but I have to think about Maly's needs and also how they are going to change as he gets older. I simply can't do a full-time job and look after him properly, but I don't see it as a sacrifice as I get so much back."

Talking to Charlotte, it is clear what a journey it has been for her and Maly. "In the time I have owned Maly, he's done far more than I ever thought was possible," she explained. "There are lots



Charlotte describes Maly as 'the dog of my life'.

JAMES WELLBELOVED
Naturally Healthy



This shy but inquisitive dog has really blossomed.

Your Dog
'Golden Oldie'
Competition

Maly's prize package

Maly will feel and look like a winner after enjoying his prize package, which includes:

- A grooming session.
- An appropriate complementary therapy session.
- A year's supply of James Wellbeloved dog food.
- PLUS Charlotte will receive a portrait of Maly.

of little victories every day. For example, he was so scared of people but now he will go and approach someone of his own accord. He has also learned to become a dog and do doggy things. Even now he is still improving — there is no sign of him plateauing yet.

"Over time I have watched my extraordinary dog blossom and reveal his very shy but very inquisitive personality — he is almost feline in his approach to life. He now not only copes with but thoroughly enjoys so many things.

The gentle touch

He is also such a giving dog — he has paid me back with so much although it's fair to say he isn't easy. He often does little things that probably go unnoticed to other people. For example, on a walk he will bound off and then come back and gently touch everyone's hand as if to say thanks, before heading off again.

"Since having Maly I've done all sorts of things and met so many people that I would otherwise have missed out on. I have lived in the same place for 30 years and thought I knew most people — however, due to Maly, I discovered I hardly knew anyone, but this quickly changed. Before, I wouldn't have dreamed of going on holiday alone, but now I will happily go with my dog."

So what of the future? "Although vets tend to estimate his age about three years younger than what I know it to be, I do have to be realistic," Charlotte continued. "He is almost 16 years old and we will have to think about scaling

down our activities soon. However, we will need to strike a balance between ageing him prematurely and preventing him overdoing things, as given a chance he will go on and on.

"I plan to take a proactive approach to him getting older and try and prevent problems before they happen. I am already considering getting a ramp for Maly in the house and I'm also monitoring his health carefully.

"When his time does come I will grieve and grieve — he is my last link to his previous owner but also the dog of my life."

Runners-up

Thank you to everyone who entered the Golden Oldie competition — the entries were wonderful, packed with amazing stories of your beloved older dogs. But only two could be selected to receive the runners-up prizes of a six-month supply of James Wellbeloved dog food. So well done to Fliss, owned by Sylvia Dobson from Walthamstow, London, and Scamp, owned by Emily Fothergill from Thirsk, North Yorkshire.