



**I AM
AVA,
SEEKER IN
THE SNOW**

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About Avalanche Rescue Dogs



At first glance, a dog's wriggling nose might not look like anything special, but inside, something amazing is going on. A dog's nose has about fifty times more smell receptors than a human's. That means their sense of smell is at least 10,000 times more powerful!

There are many ways working dogs use their superpowered noses to help humans, but one of the most important is through search and rescue. Dogs' noses are so sensitive they can smell tiny scent particles left behind by humans. This gives them the amazing ability to help find lost or missing people.

Some search-and-rescue dogs are called tracking, or trailing, dogs. These dogs are given a particular scent to pay attention to, and they follow it until they find the person they are looking for. Other dogs, like those trained for avalanche rescue, are air-scent searchers. Instead of following a particular scent, they look for "pools" of scent, or places with strong smells. This method is especially helpful when there is a lot of ground to cover, like in an avalanche zone. Avy dogs can search an area about the size of two football fields

in half an hour. By comparison, it would take twenty humans with avalanche probes about four hours to search the same area! When just minutes can be the difference between life and death, it's no wonder why avalanche rescue dogs are the stars of the search-and-rescue show.

What It Takes

Besides having excellent noses, avy dogs need to have a strong drive to find what they're looking for. That makes breeds like Labrador retrievers, German shepherds, and golden retrievers great for the job.

Many avy dogs start obedience training when they are six months to a year old. After that, they begin rescue training, which takes a whole year (that's seven dog years)! While training takes a long time, for the dogs, it is a lot like a game. Handlers challenge their dogs to find scents buried in the snow, and when the dogs succeed, they get rewarded with play and praise. This type of practice helps the dogs become snow-sniffing experts, and when their training is complete, they are able to quickly locate people or objects six feet under the surface!

Once the dogs and handlers have completed their training and passed a test to become certified, they are ready to do the important work of responding to emergencies. And while no community wants to hear that there has been a dangerous avalanche, they can rest easy knowing they are in expert hands—and paws.

Avy Dogs in this Book

Labrador Retriever

Labs were first bred to retrieve ducks from the water. Today, their hunting instincts make them great avy dogs, or at-home companions that love to play fetch.



Height: 21.5–24.5 inches

Weight: 55–80 pounds

Life Span: 10–12 years

Coat: Yellow, black, chocolate

Known for: Friendliness, intelligence, agility

Golden Retriever

The golden retriever was first bred in the Scottish Highlands to be the perfect hunting dog for the rainy and rocky landscape. Today, these beautiful animals are excellent working dogs and wonderful companions.



Height: 21.5–24 inches

Weight: 55–75 pounds

Life Span: 10–12 years

Coat: Golden, cream

Known for: Kindness, reliability, confidence