



Breaking the code

Deciphering your dog's
breed instincts and
behavioral needs.

BY
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SOME LIKE IT HOT PHOTOGRAPHY/POWER

The owner of a Dalmatian described her dog as hyperactive when they arrived for behavior consulting. “When the owner summarized the dog’s daily routine, I explained that the Dalmatian was not hyperactive, but rather simply in need of additional exercise,” says Katherine Houpt, V.M.D., of Animal Behavior Consultants of Northern Michigan in Gaylord, Mich. Dalmatians were bred to be highly active and run alongside horse-drawn coaches. A daily walk around the block may leave a Dalmatian with excess energy.

“Many owners bring in dogs demonstrating natural behaviors related to selected breed traits that are now simply inconvenient or disconcerting to owners,” Houpt says. Understanding your dog’s instincts is necessary to help you successfully manage his behavior. Once you have identified his breed type and tendencies, you can channel his energy into activities that will help satisfy those intrinsic urges.

Whether you have a purebred or mixed breed, it’s important to recognize your dog’s predisposition to keep him happy — and keep you sane.

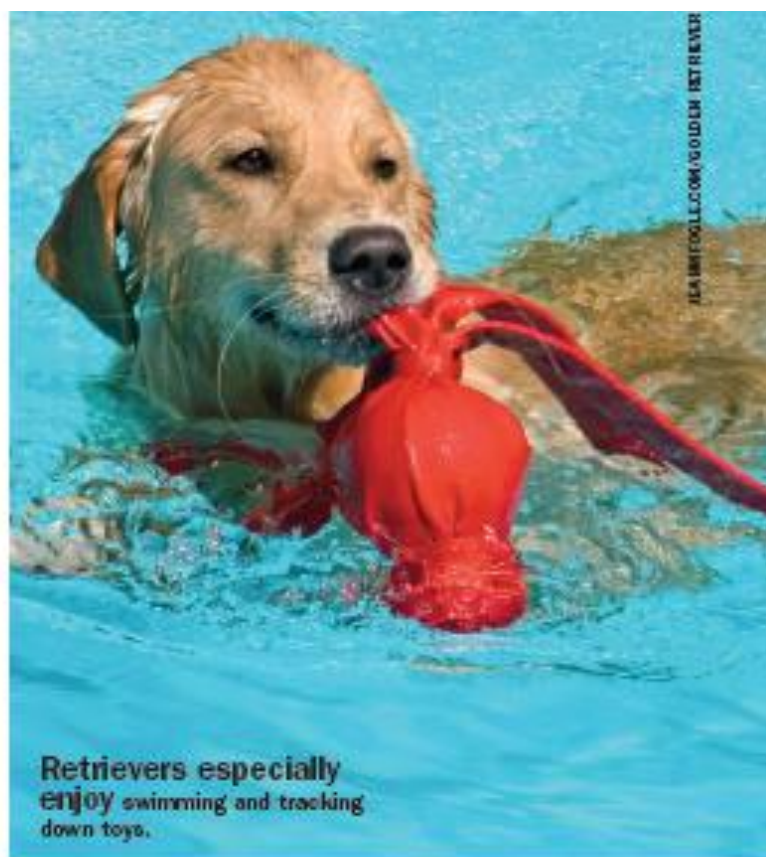
Terrier trouble

As owners of brave terriers will confirm, these Earthdogs are often more assertive than their size warrants. “Terriers were not only bred to chase rodents and vermin down holes, but to handle prey that fought back as well,” Houpt says.

These breed traits can explain feisty behavior such as digging or chasing small animals. While terriers may not have been bred for animal-friendliness, owners can mitigate that trait by training early and encouraging them to chase toys rather than neighborhood pets.

“While you can’t remove the genetic traits, you can impact how these traits are expressed with early socialization,” says David Muziello, Certified Pet Dog Trainer, director of Biscuits and Bath in New York. “Positive associations with other animals of all sizes, especially before 12 weeks of age, can help a terrier enjoy other animals throughout his life.”

For example, to raise a terrier to show self-control over his chasing instinct, teach the puppy to respond to his name (and eventually to sit) and receive a delicious treat in the presence of a small animal.



Retrievers especially enjoy swimming and tracking down toys.

LEA IMITOLE.COM/OLDEN RETRIEVER



Herding breeds naturally try to corral small animals and children.

STONE LING. IT SHOT PHOTOGRAPHY/AUSIER/LAW SHEPHERD



PATRICIA AND ROBERT PLETTO/ILL. TERRIER

A squeak toy is an substitute for the thrill of the chase.



SOME LIVE IT SHOT PHOTOGRAPHY/AND. RUSSELL TERRIER

A terrier's urge to dig can be redirected through training.

"With an older terrier who has already experienced the thrill of the chase, start practicing at a distance from temptations and use very high-value rewards," Muriello says. "The attention-grabbing reward for your dog may be a game of tug with a squeak toy made out of real sheep's wool, which can substitute for the thrill of the stalk, chase, and grab."

Handling herders

Owners of herding breeds often notice their dog "rounding up" the family. My own German Shepherd Dog once spent an exhausting afternoon herding a friend's Brittany, who refused to stay close to all of us during a hike.

Herding breeds are working dogs, happiest when trained for a purpose. Explore tracking, obedience, or service activities to keep them occupied. A warning: If you let your dog define his own job, you might begrudge his choices. I know of a herding dog who chose to find, and remove, each of her owner's yard sprinkler heads! "Herding breeds require not only exercise, but structured environmental stimulation," Houpt says.

"To channel your herding dog's urge for mental activity, provide them with food-filled puzzle toys that must be manipulated in order for the food to fall out," Muriello says. "The random dispensing can keep dogs busy rolling, biting, batting, and chewing on them."

Speedy sighthounds

Sighthounds such as the Borzoi, known for their keen eyesight and speed, were bred selectively to spot, chase, and catch prey. Owners can tap into their dogs' natural prey drive with speed-related activities such as chasing games or lure coursing.

These breeds are independent, often making traditional obedience training a challenge. "Expecting a sighthound to learn a reliable recall off-lead as quickly as a Labrador Retriever may be unrealistic," Muriello says.

Owners with time and patience, however, can teach an easily distracted dog to come back to them by using generous rewards and removing opportunities for the dog to self-reward by bolting out of sight.

"Practicing a great recall is worth your efforts because seeing the unique power and grace of these dogs running to you in a full sprint is beautiful," Muriello says. "If you're not prepared to put in the time-intensive practice with an independent breed like a sighthound, however, fenced-yard activities may be the best solution."

Sidetracked scenthounds

Scenthounds, bred to follow a scent and lead hunters over long distances, have endurance built into their genes and thrive on exercise. "An energetic dog such as a Beagle requires at least two 30-minute exercise periods per day," Houpt says. These breeds are known for their independent desire to follow a scent. Single-mindedness was bred into the scenthounds for the hunt, but it can frustrate owners at home.

"Owners of a hound dog can accomplish much with solid efforts in training, but they must realize that their commands may fall on deaf ears if the hound picks up a scent," Muriello says.

Scenthound owners can nurture their breed's remarkable sense of smell by creating games with treats to hunt in the yard or by participating in sports such as tracking trials. "The great news is



they are often very food- and toy-motivated, so reward-based training can be highly effective," Muriello says.

Gung-ho guardians

Guardian breeds such as the Rottweiler and Doberman Pinscher were bred to fulfill one of a companion dog's earliest jobs: protect the home, livestock, and property. Because of this trait selection, guardian dogs today often show a strong sense of territory and a willingness to stand watch.

Socializing your dog inside and outside the home will keep him stress-free and not unduly suspicious of outsiders. "His watchdog instinct will remain intact, but his confidence and discernment will improve with exposure and socialization," Houpt says.

Nourish your dog's working drive in rally, agility, or sports such as canicross (cross-country running with dogs), French Ring Sport (jumps, obedience, and bite work) or skijöring (cross-country skiing with dogs).

Pit bull pitfalls

Energetic and human-friendly, bully-breed types such as the American Staffordshire Terrier and the American Pit Bull Terrier, were bred as working dogs. Their energy and ability to work in stressful situations allow them to serve on search-and-rescue missions and in the military.

Exercise is required for these athletic breeds, and supervision is important. "Early socialization and training is particularly essential since bully breeds can exhibit dog-aggression," Houpt says. "The bully breeds are also particularly strong dogs, so owners must be physically capable of handling them in training."

Runaway retrievers

Retrievers were bred to retrieve birds or other prey and return them to the hunter without damage. Breeders chose them for

their soft mouths, endurance, easygoing temperament, and athleticism in the field. But owners may be frustrated by their constant urge to retrieve things like socks, water bottles, or any stray household item left in easy reach.

"Retrievers were bred for sports and endurance, and many are under-exercised," Houpt says. Because they are so easy to train, owners can explore the entire spectrum of dog activities and sports. Built to retrieve in water as well as land, retrievers especially enjoy swimming.

Improvise dock-jumping contests or join a local club to nourish your retriever's desire to polish his water entry. "Be prepared to give them plenty of toys and place them in a distinct area so your retriever always knows where to find the objects he is allowed to grab, chew, and slobber up," Muriello says.

Room for improvement

Whether bred to lead the hunt (Pointers) or hunt a bear (Plotts), your dog is genetically inclined to specific behaviors. But that doesn't mean you're destined to an eternity of playing "fetch the remote" with your eager retriever.

"A thorough understanding of what breeders have been selecting for — in some cases for over a century — will allow you to best intensify, control, or redirect your breed's innate tendencies," Muriello says. And if behavior problems persist, seek a trainer in your area who understands your dog's unique needs and can offer solutions to satisfy you both. **DF**

Lynn M. Hayner, a freelance writer and retired attorney, combines training her German Shepherd Dog with daily walks in the hill country of Austin, Texas.

Test your breed trait knowledge by taking a quiz at DogChannel.com/extras