



Out N' About
dog training



SELECTING A DOG

Looks aren't everything.

More often than not, we choose which dog to get based on appearance—whichever breed or size or color appeals to us. I may have wanted a Dalmatian after watch the movie 101 Dalmatians. Or maybe I have found myself admiring a well-trained Border Collie at the dog park, thinking, “That’s the kind of dog I want.”

But as with human relationships, outward attraction alone can be a poor predictor of long-term happiness. What’s a better yardstick? Compatibility.

Finding the right match.

To get the right dog for you, first consider your life-style. Do you run seven miles every morning or enjoy the occasional Sunday stroll? Do you want a dog that can come along when you kayak? Camp? Fish? Ski? What level of training and mental exercise do you want to provide your dog with? Is competitive agility on the agenda, or would you be happier with a couch buddy?

Next, consider your personal preferences. Are you tolerant of barking or does it drive you crazy? Is shedding okay or a big no-no? Do you find exuberance charming or exhausting? And so on.

Compiling a shopping list (...short hair, medium-sized engine, good with cats...) may strike you as too businesslike. But factoring in lifestyle and temperament compatibility drastically increases your chances of having a happy, life-long relationship with your new best friend.

Some common myths.

Certain breeds are terrible with children. Almost any breed can be either great or problematic with children, depending on how well the dog in question has been socialized to children as a puppy.

Big dogs don't do well in apartments. Actually, big dogs sometimes have lower activity levels and do better in apartments than small, very active dogs. They take up more space, that's all.

Active dogs shouldn't live in a city. Active dogs need active people, period. As it happens, dogs living in cities often get more exercise than dogs living in suburbs, probably because people with a yard tend to let their dogs out and hope they will self-exercise. They don't. They stalk birds, bark at passersby, and snooze in a sunny spot, waiting for entertainment.

Be strong...

Don't let cuteness ambush you. If you really hate barking, don't compromise and get a terrier, for example, because you meet an adorable one. The cuteness will wear off; the barking won't.