

## Factors might you need to consider in choosing a family dog?

Many people choose a dog based on experiences from their past. They may have fond memories of a dog once owned by their family when they were children. Others may go to a pet shop and fall in love with one. However the surest way to select the right family dog is to consider all the factors; what breed, sex and age, long or short-haired, pedigree or mongrel, rescue dog or specially bred. Primarily, the most important factor to consider is our lifestyle.

The way we live determines whether we should bring a dog into our home. Owning a dog needs dedication and patience, we must ask "how much time do I have for a dog?" Dogs need to be trained, exercised and groomed; they need high quality food, veterinary care, perhaps boarding and other supplies. Dogs are social animals, they need to be walked regularly and to interact with people and animals to ensure they are socialised. Some dogs require a lot of attention; they can get nervous if no one is home with them. Nervous dogs may cause a mess for the owner to clean up or may chew or scratch something. Therefore, if a potential owner works long hours, they should think carefully before getting a dog.<sup>1</sup>

Our income can determine our lifestyle and it is important to consider the financial implications of owning a dog. Typically dogs live between 8-12years. According to a report by Churchill Insurance, a dog can cost an average £22,000 over the course of its lifetime, and depending on the breed these costs can vary significantly. A Jack Russell Terrier is estimated to cost up to £18,000, compared with £33,000 for a Great Dane.<sup>2</sup>

Pet accessories can significantly add to the costs especially with the current trend for pet clothing. Designers like Burberry and Gucci are now incorporating 'doggie wear' into their collections endorsed by celebrities such as Paris Hilton. Moreover, August 2006 saw the launch of Pet Fashion Week in New York, where 124 designers showcased their products, further fuelling owners demand.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Practical Dog Listener*

*Jan Fennell*

*HaperCollins Entertainment 2002*

<sup>2</sup> "They each cost £22,000, so what's it to be - a dog or a new Mercedes?"

*Churchill Insurance report "Cost of A Dog"*

*Shan Ross*

*Article from 'The Scotsman' newspaper – 2 March 2006*

<sup>3</sup> [www.petfashionweek.com](http://www.petfashionweek.com)

*MD productions inc.*

# Walk the Dog

Hanne Grice

In association with Dog Listener

We must be realistic about our lifestyle to ensure we are ready and able to commit to owning a dog, otherwise the consequences can be devastating. According to the Dog's Trust, the number of abandoned dogs has risen where families are no longer able to cope. The statistics suggest there were 101,586 stray dogs in Britain, 7,743 dogs were destroyed for want of a home in 2005 and *"it will take over 350 years until the stray dog problem is a thing of the past"*.<sup>4</sup>

Having considered our lifestyle, we should then decide on the breed, size, sex and age best suited for our home. There are several hundred breeds of dog falling into six groups: sporting dogs, hounds, working dogs, terriers, toys and non-sporting dogs. Within these dog groups are a wide range of sizes, colours and temperaments. The Doberman Pinscher serves well as an alert and aggressive watchdog. Whereas the Beagle is a playful family pet even though it was originally bred for hunting. Breeds such as the Collie or Welsh Corgi are good herders of farm animals. While these maybe pedigree animals, there is also the mongrel (one with many breeds in its background) and this just as easily fits into family life.

We should also ask "how much space do I have for a dog". Medium-size or small dogs are best suited for the confines of city life, where apartment living is common and gardens are usually small. Dogs need space to move around in and to get the exercise they need. Large dogs take up space, eat a lot and need plenty of exercise. Someone living in an apartment would suit a companion breed like the Chihuahua, usually weighing around 6lb, rather than a Great Dane, one of the tallest breeds which can attain 36 inches (90cm).<sup>5</sup>(p125)

Choosing the right breed to suit a family with small children is crucial. Sometimes children can play roughly with their pets, wanting to carry and squeeze them or dress them up; in turn they expect the dog to be tolerant and co-operative. Some breeds have a more 'laid back' temperament than others, thrive on attention and would be more suited to this environment (e.g.) a Labrador. Having other pets at home must also be considered. Breeds like the Bassett Hound are more tolerant with other animals and interact well with them.<sup>6</sup>(p60)

Another factor is a dog's coat. The Afghan hound has beautiful long hair but it requires commitment with frequent brushing and periodic trimming. Dogs with heavy undercoats are more comfortable in colder weather, but shed more than short-coated dogs in spring and autumn. Short-coated dogs require less coat care, but may not handle cold weather

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<sup>4</sup> "Stray Dog Survey 2006"

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopedia of Dog Breeds*

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedia of Dog Breeds*

*The Dog's Trust report – August 2006*

*The Dog's Trust Press Office*

*D. Caroline Coile*

*Barron's Educational Series Inc 2005*

*D. Caroline Coile*

*Barron's Educational Series Inc 2005*

as well. Choosing a short-coated dog or one that sheds fewer hairs is especially important for allergy sufferers.

The sex of the animal should also be considered. Males are usually larger, stronger and more aggressive, making excellent watchdogs. While, females are usually more affectionate and often easier to train. Female purebreds can be mated with males of their breed and their pups can be sold for profit. Furthermore, females have strong maternal instincts and will guard children as well as their own pups. However, dogs of either sex can be neutered.

Another factor is the age of a dog. Most people want a puppy so they can build a relationship with it from an early age and who can doubt the attraction when you see a newborn. Yet, we need to be practical rather than emotional; puppies may not be suitable for everyone. An elderly person wanting a canine companion may find an energetic, excitable puppy too much. Some people prefer to own an older dog as they are out of their juvenile stage, may already have some rudimentary training and are unlikely to require the time commitment of a puppy. However, older dogs are more likely to be found in a rescue home and may have some 'bad habits' or behavioural issues instilled in them from their past. Nevertheless, older dogs can provide more sedentary companionship.

The final consideration is where to find a dog. There are a number of sources; from pet shops, kennels to newspaper advertisements and rescue centres. For some people being able to re-home a rescue dog and provide a loving environment is their primary consideration. Rescue dogs often need extra patience, training and affection to help them get over the stress of having been in a kennel or they may have behavioural issues. Potential owners must take this into account before choosing a rescue dog to avoid not being able to cope and the dog returning to a rescue centre.

The ideal place to buy a dog is directly from a reputable breeder. Breeders can be found through dog clubs or advertisements in specialist magazines such as 'Dogs Today'. The advantage being; breeding is usually carefully planned and thought through with regard to producing a healthy, good temperament pup. Most breeders will offer some form of guarantee contracting to take the dog back if they are not suitable. The same cannot always be said for puppies sold in pet shops or from 'puppy farms' where dogs are bred for the mass market. This was highlighted in a recent case where 185 Yorkshire Terriers were found starving in a windowless shed in West Sussex, following the death of their breeder.<sup>7</sup>(p40) Wherever a dog is sourced, it is vital to check its health. Owners should ask for proof, if possible, and if the dog has received the necessary vaccination shots.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Happy ending for starving Yorkies'

*Dog News article  
Your Dog magazine – August 2006*

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In summarising, owning a dog brings along its own set of responsibilities, anyone wanting to bring a dog into their lives must be willing and able to live up to those responsibilities before making this long term commitment.