

Why All Dogs Aren't Created Equal

Did you ever wonder why some of your friends' dogs seem so smart and some of your friends' dogs are not so smart? Is this because one friend is a great dog trainer and the other is a slouch? This could have much to do with it, however, several generations of breeding may have more to do with it than the abilities of your friends.

After teaching obedience classes for years, my observation is that the people with the Labrador retriever, the Golden retriever, and the German shepherds seem to breeze through classes while the Beagle/Husky mix to a St. Bernard had quite a struggle even with some of the simplest tasks. There is a very logical reason for this: the breed of dog makes the difference. Many people overlook this when they are making their choice of a family/hunting companion.

For what purposes has the dog of your choice been bred? With proper socialization and a normal upbringing, most breeds can be great dogs in the home. However, you need to be aware of the breed, its strengths and its drawbacks, and you need to be aware of your expectations for your new family member. A little bit of research into a breed goes a long way.

Although you are terribly depressed that your terrier or Dachshund just wants to dig, dig, dig, you need not be surprised after all that these dogs have been bred for hundreds of years to do just that. They have been bred to dig out rats and varmints. Or perhaps you can't understand why your husky or malamute seems to be totally deaf when you call it when it is loose? Why should it be obedient since for the past 200 years the breed has been bred and trained to pull its load forward.

The point is, if you want a dog that is easy to train and to live with, why not choose a breed that has the ability and the breeding to take these forms of training.

Many of the top 20 breeds registered with the AKC are the sporting breeds (the Labrador retriever being #1 by about 3 to 1). These dogs are so popular because they are intelligent, they want to be with you, and they thrive in the confusions of everyday life. In many cases these dogs can help you to make it through life if you are vision or hearing impaired or they can find you when you are lost in the woods or buried in an avalanche of snow or buried in the rubble of a collapsed building. They also can keep your family company, play with you, and work for you as an upland or waterfowl hunting dog.

Sporting dogs have the temperament and the trainability to make good family companions.

When people tell us about the dog they want or ask us about what dog is right for them, we ask them about their lifestyle and their expectations of a dog. We generally tell them that the Labrador retriever would be the best dog for their needs. The typical comment we get is, "Oh, everybody has a black lab." And our response is, "**If it isn't broke don't fix it.**" The Labrador retriever is *common* for a very good reason. It is the breed that meets the varying needs and lifestyles of many people and family situations.

But beware, because not all dogs, even of the same breed, are created equal. They come short, tall, fat, skinny, blocky, sleek, smart, not too smart, laid back, and energetic. This is true of all breeds, and a reputable breeder can discuss or show you parents, grandparents, and other dogs in the pup's family. If bred properly the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree, and the dogs you see in the family should represent the type of dog the pup will be.

The types of dogs we raise at Kirby Mountain Sporting Dogs come from field champions and national field champions. No, we do not compete in field trials, but there are many reasons why we have chosen to breed from this stock. The two top reasons, which we find consistent with

most breeds of dogs and particularly true of Labrador retrievers, are health and trainability. A dog that becomes a field champion is a specimen that stands above the rest both physically and mentally. A dog that competes at this level must be adaptable, must get along with people and other animals, and physically must stand the strenuous physical demands of training and competition.

There is a common misconception that field trial dogs are crazy or out of control. This thought could not be further from the truth. These dogs are doing exactly what they have been trained to do and what is expected of them at all times. A dog from this kind of breeding has the brains to live a comfortable life in your home or in the field in a hunting situation.

Unfortunately, many dogs are not from well-researched breeding, therefore people end up with a dog, after little forethought, that may not be capable of meeting their needs and expectations. When the pup grows up the owners feels that the dog is the most beautiful and greatest dog ever, and so they breed it without looking objectively to see any genetic weaknesses (bad hips or eyes, thyroid or heart problems, allergies, temperament problems etc.). Typically, this dog is then bred to the neighbors' or the best friends' dog, which is coincidentally of the same haphazard type breeding. After this successful breeding, one might end up with a mixture of pups: some demonstrating genetic problems and some carrying the genes to continue the lines of genetic problems of the breed. And yes, these are all AKC registered, pure bred dogs because when you breed an AKC registered dog to another AKC registered dog and pay the registration fee, you get a registered dog. If getting a *purebred* AKC registered dog is your primary expectation of a dog, then these puppies will meet your needs. However, if you expect a dog free of hip displasia, cataracts, seizures, heart conditions, aggression problems, or any of the other things that professional breeders loose sleep over trying to eliminate from their lines, this is not the pup for you.

There are responsible, conscientious, and knowledgeable people breeding dogs by using much of the new genetic research and information that is available to everyone out there. Seek out these people, visit them, and ask them many questions. You might have to travel a little further, wait a little longer and pay a little more money, but in the lifetime of your dog (10 – 12 years) it will most likely be worth it.

Are all dogs of the same breed the same? Is a lab, is a lab, is a lab? Even though the dogs are of the same breed, there are many differences within the breeds when it comes to both the physical appearance and the behaviors of the dog. Be sure when the time comes for you to get a dog that you have research both the breed and the breeder. And most importantly, don't set up your dog or your family for failure; get a dog that is capable of meeting your expectations and purpose. In the end everyone, including the breeder, will be happier.

Good luck,

John