

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABRADOR RETRIEVER

The answer to the question “Why the Labrador Retriever?” too often seems to be “Why not!” Since there are literally millions of happy Labrador lovers around the world, why shouldn’t everyone love a Lab? Given the breed’s good looks, trainability, loyalty, intelligence, etc., why isn’t this the dog for everyone on the planet who loves dogs?! Let’s begin by listing the kinds of people who should *not* consider the ubiquitous

SERVICE DOGS

The Labrador Retriever has been used in more areas of service to humankind than any other breed. Here are ten important areas that the breed has served:

1. Companions for all.
2. Hunting and retrieving for sportsmen.
3. Guides for the blind.
4. Hearing dogs for the deaf.
5. Arson and bomb detection.
6. Drug and substance detection.
7. Watch dogs for businesses and residences.
8. Search and rescue/avalanche and earthquake work.
9. Therapy dogs for hospitals.
10. Cancer detection.

Labrador for their lives. Then we will examine the Labrador Retriever’s character and the kinds of people who are ideal owners for this talented fellow.

OWNERS BEWARE!

POTENTIAL OWNERS WHO ARE LOOKING FOR A LAP DOG

The Lab is no lap dog. Sure he’ll want to “lap” and kiss you constantly, but he’s too big to sit on your lap while you’re reading or spending time in front of the television. Labradors like to be close to you, that’s for sure, but 60 pounds (or more) of true love is too much for anyone’s lap!

POTENTIAL OWNERS WHO DO NOT LIKE EXERCISE

Labradors love to romp and play, preferably with their trusted owners close by. Since the breed is designed for chasing birds in the swamp or swimming toward fallen ducks, Labs most definitely have “energy to spare.” Since most pet Labrador owners do not have the time or inclination to take their dogs out on weekend duck hunts, Labradors will need other outlets for their abundant energy.

Although known for their outdoor hunting pursuits, Labs are by no means outdoor-only dogs. They love to be indoors spending time with their loved ones.



POTENTIAL OWNERS WHO DO NOT HAVE A FENCED YARD

The Labrador needs a sizeable piece of property on which to exercise, and a fence is imperative. As a gundog, the Labrador does not have a strong sense of territory, and he will not guard his property the way a Rottweiler or Doberman Pinscher will. This is not to say that he is not protective—he is most protective of his family and home. However, if not fenced in he will more likely tear off in pursuit of a flapping pigeon than stay close by and stand watch.

POTENTIAL OWNERS WHO ARE SEEKING AN “ORNAMENTAL” OR OUTDOOR-ONLY DOG

The Labrador Retriever, for all his natural good looks and charm, does not fancy an owner that doesn't want to get up close to him and spend time with him indoors and out. Like most of the sporting breeds, the Labrador likes to be near his family inside the home. While it is true that the Labrador's ancestors were “kennel dogs,” today's Labrador is strongly inclined to be indoors with his master and loved ones. To keep a Labrador outdoors exclusively will be torture to the poor dog, and such owners should consider a different breed or no dog at all. While the breed is renowned for its adaptability with any lifestyle, the breed is



It's no wonder that people love Labs! These friendly, trainable dogs are personable and loyal canine companions.

best when kept indoors and given time to spend outdoors. A happy Labrador is the true Labrador, and close to you is where your Labrador will want to be.

POTENTIAL OWNERS WHO ARE FUSSY ABOUT THEIR HOME

The Labrador sheds. Even though the breed has a short, dense coat, he does not cast coat any less than any other dog. Furthermore, the Labrador is not, as a rule, a genteel or docile animal—he's a “doggy” dog, and he likes to play inside and out. Owners will have to enforce the house rules immediately with the puppy, or else he may think he can roughhouse inside the house and out. Labradors can be raucous,



LOVE OF WATER

A dog with webbed feet must love to swim! Prized for their water retrieving abilities, Labradors naturally take to water and there's not many a Lab who will turn down the opportunity to get his paws wet. Pet Lab owners often enjoy runs and games of fetch on the beach with their dogs.

rambunctious and rowdy—that's three "R's" potential owners may have to live with.

ARE YOU A LABRADOR PERSON?

If you have breezed through the first part of this chapter, thinking you are a good candidate for a Labrador, then let's explore the

breed character further to better understand what kind of a dog the Labrador Retriever really is.

For all the talents of Labrador Retrievers, always top competitors in the nation's field trials and obedience trials, the breed is still only "canine." That is to say, the Labrador is not a "superdog." Mary Feazell, a Labrador fancier and trainer, contends that the 95 percent of what a Labrador can grow up to be depends upon the owner; only 5 percent depends on the dog itself. Such a huge responsibility for the owner of this fabulously talented dog! There is little that a Labrador cannot learn. Some Labradors recognize hundreds of words and can

Puppies will be puppies—and Labrador youngsters are among the most inquisitive and "on the go" pups of all breeds.





A world of potential lies within the Labrador, and it's up to the owner to develop it to the fullest.

execute dozens of commands. Feazell says, "Being realistic, Labs swim well, but they can't walk on water."

A Labrador Retriever requires a dedicated owner, whether the pursuit is basic obedience (such as sit, stay, come, etc., the commands necessary for a well-trained home companion) or more lofty pursuits like obedience trials, field trials, agility trials, working trials, etc. Many Labrador Retrievers are so intelligent and have such a strong desire to please that they become "self-trained." Labradors are excellent problem-solvers and quickly decide what pleases their masters and what does not! Such self-learned abilities include coming when called, staying where he's put, not bolting through the front door every time

it is opened, not jumping up on visitors, permitting people to pet and touch him, not messing in the house, etc. Do not misunderstand. Labradors are smart, but you must be there to show the dog right from wrong. This is no different from instructing a child. Parents must be present for their children if they are to mature properly. Absent parents do not discipline, teach or help their children. Likewise, Labradors must receive enough training to make them capable of self-control and amenable to obeying commands, and minding their owners' wishes.

The owner controls what kind of dog his Labrador becomes. The owner provides the dog with training, guidance, encouragement and outlets for his energy and industry. The Labrador who

Despite its many joys, owning any puppy—even one as cute as a Labrador—is never always a "day at the beach."





Labs are affectionate dogs that love to be near their “people” and need to be a part of family life inside the home.

doesn't have proper “parental guidance” can develop behavioral problems, including destructive habits, aggression and fear-biting, to name a few. The owner molds his Labrador into the dog with whom he wants to live. Investing time, money and love into a dog can pay off a thousand-fold; skimping on the time and education that a dog as active and bright as a Labrador requires can be an owner's worst mistake. Do not rush into the ownership of a Labrador. This is a breed that deserves a top-quality owner, and if you're not sure about the acquisition, delay your decision.

Read more about the breed, talk to breeders, owners and trainers, attend a dog show and meet people who commit their lives to their dogs, and then you'll be better prepared to take the dive into dog ownership.

For those of you who are certain that a Labrador Retriever is the dog with whom you want to share your life, this wonderful dog can become your world. Whether it's a pet companion dog, show dog or field and working dog you require, the Labrador Retriever can become all you want in a faithful canine friend.