

Maltese Characteristics

Learn about the defining characteristics and personality of the Maltese.

Excerpts from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Maltese

The Maltese is a sweet-natured dog, alert and lively with a high level of intelligence. Although a small breed, categorized in the Toy Group, this is a soundly built little dog, capable of enjoying plenty of exercise and fun. It would be a mistake to consider the Maltese a "soft" little animal, for although not a terrier, the Maltese was considered as such for many years and his character is quite alert enough to display the occasional terrier trait. He was certainly capable of catching rats and is said to have caught the occasional badger. In Sir Richard Glynn's book *Champion Dogs of the World*, the Maltese is described as "an attractive little imp," which probably describes the breed in a nutshell! But if you want to know more, then read on.

Like the majority of smaller dogs, the Maltese is a reasonably long-lived breed, so this is another factor that must be seriously contemplated before deciding that this is really the breed for you. Clearly, when taking a new animal into your home, the ultimate aim will be that the dog remains with you for his entire life.

Despite various ups and downs through the course of history, the Maltese is now well established in many countries of the world. In the US alone, over 12,000 new puppies are registered with the American Kennel Club each year.

PERSONALITY

The Maltese has a certain "something" about him, demanding that people look at him, and to these looks he returns a kind of self-satisfied expression. He is certainly a vigorous little companion, full of humor and a sense of fun. Left to his own devices, he would willingly turn out mice and other small rodents from the barn, which is not always possible when a dog is kept in long coat. Certainly a Maltese will thoroughly enjoy the sights and smells of a country walk, although this can, it must be understood, badly damage a show coat.

Affectionate with his owners, the Maltese is quite an individualist and does not always take readily to strangers. This is a clean and fastidious breed, one that has understandably been a muchloved pet with a certain refinement about him. Having said that, a few have taken up the sport of mini-agility and others enjoy obedience work.

A fearless little dog despite his diminutive size, the Maltese can make a good watchdog for he is always alert and filled with determination. In the home, the Maltese is a perfect small housedog, fitting in well with whatever the household routine.

MALTESE WITH CHILDREN

Provided that parents have trained their children to treat dogs gently, being neither rough nor aggressive, most Maltese enjoy playing with youngsters. It must, though, be understood that young children should always be supervised when in the company of dogs in order that accidents do not happen, however unintentional they might be. No matter how hardy your Maltese may be, he is still a fragile few pounds that can be badly injured by a boisterous child. The small size is attractive for children, who are also usually enchanted by the pretty appearance and long flowing coat. If yours is a show dog, do take care that a child doesn't decide to groom out (not-so-carefully) all the coat while you're not looking!

MALTESE WITH OTHER FAMILY PETS

Always when one animal is introduced to another, careful supervision is essential. Most Maltese are quite prepared to associate with other animals, but a lot understandably depends on the personality of the other. An older dog or cat may not take readily to a newcomer in the household, although others accept them well. When a Maltese does find another canine or feline friend, usually the relationship is lasting and sincere. Indeed, one of the dangers is mutual grooming between animal friends, which can play havoc with the long coat of the Maltese, especially behind the ears!

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Small in size, the Maltese generally weighs about 4–6 lbs. and the height should not exceed 10 inches from ground to withers. This is a compact breed, with about the same length from withers to root of tail as the height at withers. Both males and females are pretty little dogs, although there is a distinction between the two.

COLOR AND COAT

The white coat is, of course, the breed's crowning glory, but regular attention is necessary to keep these flowing locks

clean and in good condition. Most owners tie up the hair in a cute little topknot, showing the features of the face and helping to keep the hair away from the eyes. This adds to the overall attractive appearance of the Maltese, certainly a breed that has many dedicated admirers, and deservedly so.

Although the long, white coat makes a splendid sight and needs regular attention, there is no undercoat, as in the case of the breed's cousin, the Bichon Frise. This makes the Maltese's coat a little easier to manage. An added advantage is that, provided it is kept in good condition, the coat will not shed all over your carpets and furniture.

The straight coat is silky in texture and should never be woolly, another important distinguishing feature between the Maltese and its close relations. Although of good length, it is important that the coat is not so long that it impedes action when the dog is moving. For the show dog, a coat can hide a multitude of sins, but a good judge will always feel carefully beneath the coat to check that a glamorously coated Maltese is also well constructed.

Coat color and coat presentation on the Maltese are very important, so owners of the breed must be prepared to put in a good deal of work to keep it in tip-top condition, never looking dirty or unkempt. A white coat will only stay clean if bathed frequently.

The color of the Maltese's coat is always white, but slight lemon markings are permissible. The whiteness of the coat contrasts strikingly against the black nose pigment and dark, oval eyes with their black haloes of dark skin surrounding them. Even the pads of the feet should be black.

[Next page >](#)

[Maltese Health Issues](#)

[Excerpts from Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Maltese](#)