

Dog Fancy Breed Profile Parson Russell Terrier

Parson Russell Terrier in Brief

Country of origin: England.

Group: Terrier (AKC and UKC).

Life span: 12 to 16 years.

Color: White, white with black or tan markings, or tri-colored, primarily on the head and tail.

Coat: Two varieties, with broken more common. Broken: A coarse, harsh, weatherproof double coat with a tendency to curl or wave. Smooth: Coarse, flat, hard double coat.

Grooming: Brush weekly.

Height/weight: Between 12 to 14 inches, 13 to 17 pounds (males slightly larger than females).

Trainability: Moderate, but they can learn almost anything with treats and an active, creative approach.

Activity level: High.

Known health problems: Juvenile cataracts, deafness, and luxating patellas (kneecaps slipping out of place).

Best home: Indoors with people around most of the time and plenty of activities and stimulation.

Good with children: Yes, with supervision.

Good with other pets: Can be same-sex dog-aggressive, especially with other terriers. Will probably chase cats and small animals.

National breed club: Parson Russell Terrier Association of America (PRTAA) <http://www.prtaa.org/>

Parson Russell Terrier

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Parson Russell Terrier: Larger than life

The bold, exuberant Parson Russell Terrier brings verve and intelligence to everything he does.

Eve Adamson

A new fishtank in the house was capturing everyone's attention — including Sarah's. A typically curious, agile, and clever Parson Russell Terrier, she waited until the Reynolds family left the room, then got straight to work. First, the little broken-coated 2-year-old Parson Russell Terrier jumped onto the dining room table, then leapt across to the kitchen counter. From there, she made her way over to the top of the aquarium. "We caught her trying to figure out how to get the fish out of the tank," says owner and Parson Russell Terrier breeder Kathleen Reynolds of Redondo Beach, Calif.

Fox on the run

Bred to be problem solvers, tireless hunters, and sharp barkers, Parson Russell Terriers got their name from the Reverend John Russell. He bred mostly-white, wire-haired terriers to keep the red fox moving for him and his hounds to chase, flushing the fox from deep cover or bolting it from its underground den in the Parson Russell Terrier's native England. Fast enough to keep up with hounds, narrow-chested enough to follow a fox into its den and chase it back out again, loud enough to be heard from underground, and fearless enough to hunt fierce quarry that often outsized him, this little white fellow with the head and tail colored in black, tan, or tri-color remains popular in Europe and England.

Since the 1930s, Americans have also hunted with the Parson Russell Terrier, but the American Kennel Club didn't recognize the breed until 1998, when it was officially named the Jack Russell Terrier. In 2003, the American Kennel Club approved a name change for AKC-registered dogs to Parson Russell Terrier (for more on this name change, see "Parson or Jack?" on page 49). In 2004, the Parson Russell Terrier was the 72nd most popular AKC breed in the United States.

Busy body

Lap dog? Who you calling a lap dog? Don't be fooled by the breed's size. The Parson Russell Terrier's hunting heritage rears its busy head every day, keeping these dogs on the go and in the mix. "They are first and foremost extremely active," says Kalen Dumke of Redgranite, Wis., vice president of the Parson Russell Terrier Association of America. "A good way of describing them is 'busy.' This type of temperament could and does drive some people over the edge."

Dumke works with rescued Parson Russell Terriers and sees many of the breed surrendered to shelters. "Their owners can't handle the constant motion," she says. "They need space to run — not just circles around, over, and under your furniture, but space. I highly recommend a securely fenced yard. If you don't give them enough exercise, prepare for the consequences."

The perfect breed for highly active families, Parson Russell Terriers love to learn tricks, retrieve balls, catch Frisbees, or

go on runs, boating, hiking, or on car trips. "Plan on activities for the dog on a daily basis," Dumke says. "They will keep up with you every step of the way, and enjoy every minute of it." Their relentless energy may be one reason why so many Parson Russell Terriers make it in show business (think Eddie on Frasier, Wishbone from the PBS series, and the dog in the movie My Dog Skip). The long hours, physical and mental challenges, and adoring fans all suit this get-up-and-go breed.

Many Parson Russell Terriers have achieved titles and awards in flyball, agility, and earthdog. "You need to do something with this breed. Don't expect them to exist just because they get food and water," says Peggy Crane, a breeder in Chico, Calif. Parson Russell Terriers need attention ... and toys. "Make sure they have a lot of toys, and rotate them," says Reynolds, whose three Parson Russell Terriers have more than 30 toys between them.

Sometimes, Parson Russell Terriers just want to jump. "They will stand in front of their owners just jumping up and down, like they have springs on their feet," Dumke says. (Now if only you could bottle that energy...)

Who's the boss?

The consequences of a physically and mentally untrained, unchallenged Parson Russell Terrier include massive destruction ("They will chew their way through your house," Dumke says), excessive barking, and dominant behavior. "Please remember that although this dog is cute, it needs to understand the family pack order," Dumke says. "Prepare to be tested." Parson Russell Terriers also love to dig, a function of their instinct to unearth burrowing quarry, so use barriers, designated digging spots, and plenty of regular stimulation to help head off a garden full of holes and frequent escape attempts under the fence.

Parson Russell Terriers need early, frequent, consistent training so they learn house rules and who's in charge. "Train your Parson Russell before he trains you," Crane urges. Socialize puppies to other dogs to minimize the terrier's natural dog-aggression, and train this food-motivated breed with treats. "You don't get where you want to go without using food," Crane says.

Terrier love

In short, the Parson Russell Terrier's reputation for being a difficult breed is well-deserved.

"There is some basis for that stereotype," Reynolds says. "You have to want a dog that is demanding. They want your attention and they want to play all the time. When you get a Parson, you get a lot of dog."

Welcome to the terrier life

"Terriers aren't like other dogs," Crane says. "They can't just kick back and lay around." Like other terriers, Parson Russell Terriers can be dog-aggressive, especially toward other terriers of the same sex, and can't be trusted around cats and small animals that look, naturally, like varmints requiring enthusiastic pursuit. Older children, on the other hand, can make great companions for some terriers because they have similar energy levels, as long as they know how to treat a dog correctly. A threatened, aggravated, or abused Parson Russell Terrier may defend himself with a growl or a nip, but no correctly bred, properly treated Parson should ever be aggressive to a human.

"If you get a collar on him, crate train him, get involved in activities, and if your Parson is obedience-trained by the time he is 6 months old, you'll have a good, balanced dog," Crane says. But don't expect the Parson Russell Terrier to settle down, the hilarity to cease, or the charm to diminish. "After 20 years, I would still never be without one," Reynolds says. "They are just unique characters, each and every one of them."

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