

Meet the Breed: Blushing Beauty

Beneath the Pharaoh Hound's chiseled good looks and athletic prowess lies an opinionated jester.

Kim Campbell Thornton

Harry was riding shotgun on the way to a dog show. His owner, Margaret Worth, stopped for doughnuts and set the bag on the dashboard. Harry stared straight ahead, appearing to ignore the treats. After they arrived at the show, Margaret stepped away from the car for just a moment to greet a friend. When she returned, the doughnuts were gone. The expression on Harry's face said it all: "Doughnuts? What doughnuts?"

The Pharaoh Hound may have an exotic, regal appearance befitting a breed named after ancient Egyptian rulers, but beneath that chiseled exterior lies a sense of humor. "You'd better have a sense of humor, too, if you're going to own one," says longtime breeder-exhibitor and Pharaoh Hound Club of America board member Pam Haig.

An enigmatic past

The Pharaoh Hound has long had a reputation as one of the oldest dog breeds, said to date to 3,000 B.C. Modern genetics, however, show that the breed was created much more recently, perhaps in the 17th century on the Mediterranean island of Malta, where it is called the Kelb tal-Fenek and is used to hunt rabbits (its name means "dog of the rabbit" or "rabbit hound"). The breed was declared the national dog of Malta in 1979.

No matter. The people who love the breed prize the Pharaoh not for its origins – whatever they may be – but for the dog it is today: a sleek sighthound with a rich tan or chestnut coat; an intelligent, playful, loving temperament; and the unique characteristic of blushing bright pink when it's happy or excited.

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