

Popular Dogs: Border Collies

Take a peek into the quirks and perks of Border Collie ownership.

By Helen F. Philips

“Why do they do that?” This is probably the question most frequently asked of Border Collie owners. “Why does that dog hide and sneak up behind the other?” “Why is that dog biting at the rain?” “Why is that dog attacking the lawn mower?” “Why is that dog staring at the door?”

These types of questions are just a regular part of everyday life as a Border Collie owner.

Having been captivated by Border Collies for over 20 years, I do not find it unusual that the vacuum must be vanquished daily as it lurks silently behind the door or that the sound of coffee grinding makes my dogs crazy. But to dog owners accustomed to a relatively quiet pup, content doing little but eating and lounging on the couch, Border Collies appear very strange indeed.

Border Collies are beautiful, deeply affectionate, sweet, amusing, bright, incredibly active, fun-loving, exceptionally intense dogs that stare at anything that catches their eye. Considered to have the intelligence of a 5-year-old child, their thinking skills lead them into designing their own creative mischief if they are not kept mentally and physically challenged. Border Collies can be a constant source of pleasure if you find a bit of mania and quirkiness delightful; a migraine headache, if it's only peace and quiet and relative inactivity that you want. *Obsession, by Collie Klein*

Not all Border Collies are quite the same, but virtually all have one major ingredient: They are obsessive, and their obsessions take many different forms. Motorized noises arouse many Border Collies to a frenzied state, so activities, such as weed whacking, vacuuming and mowing the lawn, must be handled when the dog isn't around. The frenetic behavior differs with each dog: One of my dogs barks frantically and spins in endless circles; another takes menacing bites out of the offending object—dangerous for the machine in the case of the vacuum; dangerous for the dog when the weed whacker is involved—and one will seize anything close by and literally shake it into oblivion.

The motion of raindrops is also endlessly fascinating, as is the snow flying from the shovel when I'm trying to clear a path. One dog tries to catch the snow; another simply grabs the shovel, dumping its contents back to the ground. A sense of humor is required when the dog makes an odious task take longer than it should.

Border Collies obsess over certain types of objects. Lisa Ochoa of the Illini Border Collie Rescue in Urbana, Illinois, had a much beloved Border Collie named Oliver who was so obsessed with tin cans, he continually opened the pantry door and dragged the cans all over the floor. Ochoa's favorite story involves a Border Collie that lived in a house bordering a golf course hole. “When the family left for work and school each day, the Border Collie scooted out the dog door and hid in the bushes around the hole, then ran out and stole all the golf balls that appeared. Later investigation revealed that the dog had stashed something to the tune of 1,800 balls in the crawl space under the family's house,” Ochoa says.

Three Border Collies I owned in the past were obsessed by the cat door leading into the kennel and the possibility that, at some time, the cat might walk through (although the cat only came in on cold winter evenings). For months on end the Border Collies would sit, mesmerized, staring at the door and wait for the cat to appear.

Snap, owned by Linda McHugh of Danvers, Massachusetts, is obsessed by remote controls and has learned to turn on both the ceiling fans and the television. Could dialing the phone be next?

Rarely have I met a Border Collie not totally captivated by tennis balls. Typical Border Collie behavior is to drop a tennis ball at your feet and lie on the ground staring at it or, as one of my dogs loves to do, shove it between your knees. If you pretend to ignore it, the dog will follow you with the ball for hours, dropping it at your feet and resuming their crouched position in front of it. Kim Augustine of Mayville, Michigan, finds it quite amusing that her Border Collie Spy has the uncanny ability to drop one of his prized toys in her morning coffee. Border Collies will not be denied!



For a Border Collie owner, a quiet, in-your-chair evening watching television includes tossing a steady stream of balls to the dog. Joey Money of Boulder, Colorado, says, "I am always in a ball game when I watch television in the evening, all three dogs focused and waiting for their turn to catch the ball." If you attempt to sleep during the day, your Border Collie will continue to present even more balls for play. I have awakened from many naps to find as many as 10 balls lined up by my side. Border Collies do not consider sleep a proper response to an invitation to play.