

Bulldogs

Our no-bull guide goes beyond basic assumptions and shows you what living with a Bulldog is really like.

By Susan McCullough

Everyone knows what a Bulldog looks like. This stocky, blocky dog with muscular shoulders, stubby little legs and imposing jowls is probably one of the most recognizable breeds on the planet. Athletic teams from the University of Georgia to National University in the Philippines have adopted the Bulldog as their mascot — perhaps because they hope that the dog's intimidating appearance and reputed tenacity will inspire team members to perform in a similar fashion.

But appearances can be deceiving, and legends are not necessarily truisms. Here are eight common assumptions about the temperament and other characteristics of the Bulldog — and the truth about what it's really like to live with this breed.

Assumption No. 1: Bulldogs are Lazy

With his lumbering looks, roly-poly gait and leisurely pace, the Bulldog has a reputation of being on the lazy side. But whether that reputation is justified is not an either/or issue.

Certainly the average Bulldog has unmatched skills as a canine couch potato. Bully devotees acknowledge that this breed likes to snooze the day away, preferably in close proximity to a person. "They like to be touching you, either lying next to you, across your lap or at your feet," admits Linda Shelburg, secretary and treasurer of the Bulldog Club of Central Iowa.

But a desire to take things easy doesn't mean that the Bulldog isn't capable of doing a good day's work. Consider the case of Uga VI, the Bulldog who serves as the sixth-generation live mascot of the University of Georgia's football team. Uga lives with his people, the Seiler family, in Savannah, Georgia, but is expected to appear at every Georgia football home game in Athens. He also shows up at many away games and at most postseason contests. No matter where he is, though, he walks through the players' locker room and out onto the field to his own doghouse, which is situated in front of the student section. Along the way, he is expected to pose for numerous photographers, and he obliges where he can. After each game, he goes home for a well-deserved rest.

Need another example of a hard-working Bulldog? Look to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where a Bulldog named Jack serves as the Georgetown Hoyas' mascot and lives in the university's Jesuit community. But Jack doesn't cloister himself with the clergy all day long. He makes himself available to the 20 or so Georgetown students who take him for three walks per day on a rotating basis (the students are known as the Jack Crew). He appears not only at Georgetown games but also at other official functions, including student meetings. That said, the university tries to be considerate of Jack's limitations, noting that "like all Bulldogs, Jack is not able to walk far, and thus typically can attend only those events held on campus."

These hard-working Bulldogs certainly disprove the idea that Bulldogs are lazy. It's probably safe to say that at least some dogs who represent other reputedly more energetic breeds don't work as hard as these and other Bulldog mascots do.

Assumption No. 2: Bulldogs are Stubborn

The Bulldog breed also has a reputation for being stubborn — or, put more diplomatically, for being tenacious. In this case, that reputation is probably justified, if sometimes a little overblown.

Many of those who know and love the Bulldog readily admit that their breed is at least somewhat hard-headed. "The Bulldog is a very affectionate animal with his own agenda," acknowledges Bulldog rescue group coordinator Debbie Paxton of Clifton Forge, Virginia. "I find their stubborn natures comical as I watch their minds choose to obey or not, depending on what's in their best interest."

Other Bulldog devotees agree, but point out that such stubbornness doesn't preclude the Bulldog's potential as a fine

canine companion. "They are very adaptable to new situations," says Shelburg, who lives in West De Moines, Iowa. "But some are very stubborn; they usually will do what you want them to but in their own good time."

Assumption No. 3: Bulldogs Can't Be Trained

This assumption goes along with the assumption that Bulldogs are stubborn. Although these two assumptions often go hand-in-hand among those who don't know the breed well, Bulldog devotees will argue that their breed's reputation for tenacity does not preclude trainability.

Caroline Wilson, who is active in the Tampa Bay (Florida) Bulldog Club, cites her late great Bulldog, Little Man, as an example of how biddable this breed can be. "We did [competitive] obedience," says Wilson, who lives in Sarasota, Florida. "He would look at me when he completed a command, and I could see the love he had for me in his eyes. All he wanted was to please me and to know that I loved him."

Christine Aaron, a breeder in Reston, Virginia, believes that the breed's reputed training challenges are a big misconception. "They are extremely trainable," she says. "In fact, there are several Bulldogs in agility events and with performance titles in obedience and rally. The number of Bulldogs in the performance community is increasing."

As an example, Aaron cites one of her own Bulldogs, Delmar. "He took to training very easily," she recalls. "He graduated from puppy kindergarten at the head of his class. I've taken him to agility clinics where they teach owners and dogs to run an agility course ... Delmar has a great time: He takes to the obstacles very easily and loves to run tunnels!"

Aaron also notes that Delmar has earned his AKC Canine Good Citizen certificate and Therapy Dog International certification. Both programs require a dog to complete 10 to 12 exercises that reflect a dog's proficiency in obeying specific commands as well as the dog's ability to adapt to new situations.

That said, Aaron acknowledges that Bulldogs "certainly don't react to training as easily as a Border Collie or a working dog. [But Bulldogs] were not bred to work." Still, neither she nor others who know and love this breed would claim that these dogs cannot be taught to live in harmony with their people.