

## Popular Dogs: Chihuahuas

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*Eve Adamson*

### Mini But Mighty

So you think you run things, do you? So you think you are in charge? Then perhaps you haven't yet brought home your new Chihuahua puppy. This tiniest of the toy breeds may weigh less than the 5-pound bag of sugar in your pantry, but this breed is sweeter than a sack of sweetener and has a super-sized emotional life that consumes a significant chunk of the hearts, minds and energies of its human subjects.

"They're small, but they're a lot of work," says Kelley Harper of Iowa City, Iowa, about her 4-year-old tricolor Chihuahua, Tea. "It's harder to break them of bad habits. It's harder to train them because they're so sensitive that you can barely raise your voice. It's harder to housetrain them because they don't like the cold, rain or snow -- but look!" says Harper, her voice softening. "She knows I'm talking about her. She's sitting there giving me that look."

Something about Chihuahuas prompts dog owners to put up with their eccentric habits and Napoleonic personalities, but not every dog lover is cut out for life under the emotional rule of a 2-pound puppy. Are you ready to cater to your little dog's needs, or will you lose patience for the curious combination of overlord posturing and extreme sensitivity? Read on to find out more about what life with a Chihuahua is really all about.

### Chihuahua Charm

Intelligent and intuitive, Chihuahuas have been bred for centuries to serve as companions to humans, and this little breed takes its job seriously. "I personally believe they're intuitive. If you talk to them, they really listen and respond to you," says Maggie Penziner of Gallatin Gateway, Montana, who shares her life with 9-year-old Joey. Although some Chihuahuas like to chase butterflies, commune with other Chihuahuas, lord over large dogs or lounge in warm sunbeams, the Chihuahua's first and most important priority is its favorite person. They aren't pre-occupied with other things the way many breeds are. Their main preoccupation is you," Penziner says.

This quality draws many people to Chihuahuas, but irritates others. "If you don't like a needy dog that wants to be with you all the time, this probably isn't the best breed for you," Harper says. "You have to spend a lot of time with them and you have to think about what they need and what will be too much for them."

For that investment, however, Chihuahua owners get a lot in return. Part of the Chihuahua's charm is its ability to entertain, and Chihuahuas think of some pretty clever ways to accomplish that mission. "Joey prefers musical comedy. If I have the television on, Joey has some favorite music and he likes to sing along. During his favorite commercials, the music that precedes the news hour on PBS or especially if I am listening to opera, he will throw up his head and actually sing -- soft, little, melodious sounds with a range of pitches -- or sometimes just howl with abandon. I'll do it with him," Penziner says. "After a while, I have to turn the music off because I'm afraid he'll get hoarse."

Joey is also so tuned in to Penziner that he recognizes when certain programs that she watches are about to start. "I'm a newsaholic and I have C-Span on a lot. Just prior to some of the programs I always watch, his breathing will change and he'll look at me, as if to let me know my show is coming on. It's as if he's thinking, 'I know she's going to watch this one,'" Penziner says.

Chihuahuas also have a wonderful sense of play. Although they tend to hoard their stash of favorite things, they often like to bring out their toys for a rousing game of fetch, a gentle tugging contest or just to show you what they have. "Joey initiates play," Penziner says. "He'll lead me into the bedroom and jump around on the bed, running in circles from the foot of the bed to the pillow while I clap my hands. Or, all of a sudden, when I'm sitting and reading, he'll decide to get my attention with a toy in his mouth. He does this quite a bit."

Often compared to terriers in personality, Chihuahuas can be quite vocal in protecting their territory, and are sometimes compelled to chase after small critters in the backyard. Many also gut their stuffed toys or tear them to shreds. However, Chihuahuas are just as likely to keep their toys in immaculate condition. "Joey is quite gentle with his toys. His favorite is a

little rag doll with long hair. He gets a little frustrated by big toys if he can't carry them around easily," Penziner says.

#### Diminutive Divas

Sometimes, the funniest Chihuahua moments arise out of this breed's fastidious and picky habits. Choosy eaters, many Chihuahuas turn up their short little noses at all but one or two brands of dog food or treats. "Tea likes certain brands, but won't eat others," Harper says. "She'll take them, but then she'll set them down on the floor and just look up at me like, 'What the heck was that?'"

Notorious for disliking the chilly damp feeling of snow or wet grass on their tiny paws, Chihuahuas can be incorrigible about going outside in inclement weather. On a recent cold, snowy day, Harper tried to let Tea into the backyard from the screened porch for a potty break. "She doesn't like the snow, but I thought she had to go out," Harper says.

Tea had other ideas. As soon as Harper opened the back door to the screened-in porch, Tea darted into her crate, which was on the porch. When Harper turned around to see what Tea was doing, the little dog sprinted out of the crate and flung herself back into the house -- nose-diving through the screen door. "She actually broke through the screen!" Harper marvels. "I chased her all over the house. It was hilarious. She clearly was not going to go outside, so I gave up."

Tea also dislikes slick floors. "Tea is usually right with me, but if I walk into the kitchen, she stops at the edge of the carpet, lets me pass, and won't set foot on the linoleum until I'm all the way through the kitchen and on the carpet on the other side. Then she'll dart across the floor to find me again," Harper says.

If you love to pamper your pet, a Chihuahua is an excellent choice. Perfectly sized for tiny sweaters, coats, dog jewelry, and fancy collars, and always willing to recline on a luxurious dog bed or ride in a fashion-conscious shoulder bag designed for small dogs, Chihuahuas are ready-made for luxury. Many Chihuahuas enjoy the attention they get when all dolled-up, and what small dog wouldn't enjoy a Chi-sized ruffled pink canopy bed, faux-fur-covered chaise or miniature overstuffed sofa? "Joey has dog beds all over the house, a special little pillow on the sofa and folded blankets in one corner of the kitchen," Penziner says.

Well, of course he does.