

Coonhounds

Get to know the softer side of the Coonhound.

By Nikki Moustaki

There are four things, besides food, that a coonhound loves—hunting, running, sleeping and snuggling. Add baying, countersurfing, scent trailing and engaging in pure impishness, and you have a good idea of what life with a coonhound is like.

“Coonhounds are smart, enthusiastic and extremely naughty!” says Lynn Wilson of Rocking W Coonhound Crew in Palestine, Texas, owner of 11 Redbones and one Treeing Walker. “They have a lot of energy and their intelligence leads them into trouble,” Wilson says. “Despite all correction, I have several dedicated countersurfers and trash pickers, and I sometimes find the living room redecorated with the contents of the trash,” adds Wilson. “They’re constantly doing architectural work to the pen, digging holes big enough to hide in, and seem to spend their days plotting ways to escape. My husband says they destroy more every week than he can repair all weekend. I have to love them, though, even when they’re standing in the middle of a trash-strewn room with that adorable ‘Who me?’ look on their faces!”

Despite the naughtiness, coonhound owners are fiercely dedicated to their breeds and sing their praises louder than a hound can howl. “Coonhounds are loving and eager to please. They are people-oriented and prefer being with their person to just about any other activity—except maybe eating. Their extreme intelligence makes them companions worth spending time with, not just pets to love. At the same time, their independent nature keeps them from being ‘Velcro dogs,’ like some other breeds,” says Beth Spillers of Moulton, Alabama, president and founder of Dixie Coonhound Rescue.

Coonhound Quirks

Coonhound owners are fiercely loyal to their breeds, in spite of some conspicuous quirks. To neighbors or visitors, these quirks can be downright exasperating. Barking while running and baying at the slightest sound are among their eccentricities. “The song of a coonhound in full cry is a delicious yodel that echoes off the mountains around us in the Catskills,” says Emily Plishner of West Kill, New York, owner of a rescued Redbone named Rooster. “Rooster’s voice has a round mezzo quality that reminds me of Jessye Norman, the opera singer. Coonhounds are not for people with touchy neighbors. Also, other dogs find that playing with such noisy dogs is not much fun.”

Though these dogs are notoriously loud and can frighten the uninitiated, most are not aggressive toward people. “Black and Tans look like uncropped Doberman Pinschers to someone not familiar with the breed, but they are not protection dogs,” says Lori Spier of Hyattsville, Maryland, member of the American Black and Tan Coonhound Club (ABTCC) and owner of two Black and Tans and one Treeing Walker mix. “If a stranger comes into my house, they stand a greater chance of being slimed to death than being bitten. Of course, those coonhound voices baying gloriously every time they hear something is usually enough to terrify people. For us, though, nothing says ‘I love you’ quite like a chorus of coonhounds.”

Then there’s the drool. Die-hard neatniks need not apply for a coonhound, unless they want to spend many long hours on the therapy couch working out their tidiness issues. “My walls look like they’ve been decorated by a demented 3 year old with a can of Spackle,” Spier says. “We don’t mind, and always keep a drool towel handy to wipe slobbery lips. Other people are thoroughly grossed-out by the thought of drool cascading onto the floor. If you are house-proud or have an all-white interior, you might want to consider another breed. Total cleanliness and coonhounds are not compatible,” Spier continues. “Big feet bring in lots of dirt and mud; big lips fling lots of drool. Also, if you have loads of breakables at tail level, I suggest packing them up. One swipe of a Coonie tail usually means a clear table.”

Another coonhound quirk is its capacity to find something to do, whether or not you’ve approved of the form of amusement. “If they are bored, or not getting the required intellectual stimulation, they will entertain themselves, and you probably won’t like how they do it—putting a 5-pound bag of pasta in the toilet, spreading trash throughout the house, and stripping the beds, sofa and closet,” says Lynn Fredericks of Lake Waukomis, Missouri, owner of two Redbones.

“Nothing is safe in my house, except for inside the microwave, because you need a thumb to open it! Top of the refrigerator—not a problem for a dog bred to climb trees,” Fredericks continues. “They constantly amaze me with the things they figure out. They regularly open doors. All our outside doors have to have deadbolts that require thumbs, because if they don’t, the coonhounds will leave. When their noses start working and their ears shut, getting them to listen to commands is difficult.”
so agile, some will even jump right up on the counter!”