

Popular Dogs: Doberman Pinschers

Ideal Doberman temperament is steady, confident and outgoing. The Doberman should be reserved with strangers, but willing to accept almost anyone.

Audrey Pavia

We've all seen them: Those yellow, diamond-shaped "Beware of Dog" signs. Although some of them bear only the words in bold, black letters, many of them include a drawing of a snarling, sharp-toothed black dog ready to rip you apart if you set foot over the property line. The dog most often featured on this menacing sign? A Doberman Pinscher, of course.

For decades, Dobermans have suffered from an unfair image. Depicted not only on "Beware of Dog" signs, but in movies, television and elsewhere as vicious beasts that would be happy to tear any human from limb to limb at the slightest provocation, Dobermans have been given an unfair rap, according to breeders, owners and others who love the breed.

"A lot of the bad dog image that Dobermans have is what the public has seen on TV," says breeder Brandi Canfield, owner of Amaris Dobermans in Littlerock, Calif. "I have two Dobermans that have done movies: Nitro and Kia. They have a wonderful temperament but can be cued to show teeth, act aggressive and appear vicious. In reality, Dobermans are intelligent and sensitive family dogs, super with children and loyal to their people."

Another reason the breed is perceived to be aggressive is because Dobermans have been legitimately bred for guard dog work for decades. In the past, some breeders overemphasized this aspect of the breed's temperament, however, creating dogs that were aggressive-although atypical of the breed.

Dobermans were originally bred to be guard dogs. Twenty-five to 30 years ago, and beyond, Dobs were very sharp (aggressive), says breeder Jim Briley, owner of Dobs of Aquarius in Opelousas, La. Some of these dogs would not allow anyone to touch them, even in the show ring. Peggy Adamson, a Dobe judge and arguably one of the most knowledgeable Dobe people worldwide, disqualified a well-known Dobe while judging an extremely prestigious show because the dog displayed viciousness. This was probably the beginning of conscious efforts to breed out sharpness in the breed.

The Real Deal

So if the Doberman's image of viciousness is a false one created by Hollywood and a few aggressive dogs of the past, what is the true Doberman temperament?

"Ideal Doberman temperament is steady, confident and outgoing. The Doberman should be reserved with strangers, but willing to accept almost anyone as soon as I do," say breeders Ray and Judy Bohnert, owners of Equinox Permanent Registered Dobermans in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. "Many of our Dobermans have a comical character about them, and a quick wit coupled with a sense of humor," say the Bohnerts.

Breeder Dayna C. Hewitt, owner of Desta Doberman in Gloucester, Va., sees the breed as a dog that is watchful over its human family, but far from the vicious dog depicted in the media. "The ideal Doberman should be inquisitive, bright, brave and faithful to its family and property," Hewitt says. "I have never been put off by a Doberman that is watchful of strangers, perhaps sizing them up to see whether it wants to be friendly. A Doberman should have the smarts to ascertain the situation and make level-headed judgments about people. Dobermans should be thinkers and trustworthy around children and old people."

Dogs with Character

Those who responsibly breed Dobermans do more than just claim that the breed has a good temperament. They have dogs that exhibit these good dispositions on a regular basis.

Caring for children and providing them with companionship is a favorite pastime among Dobermans, according to breeders.

"Being show dogs, my dogs are very friendly, however, for many years, they hadn't really been exposed to small children," says Hewitt. "When my grandchild came along, we were somewhat worried about it. At first, the Dobs stood over her looking somewhat confused at her crying and noise making, but after months of being around her, they became

her little police dogs. They herded her in the yard when she got too far from the porch and barked whenever she fell or got into some kind of difficulty. It was as if they were warning, 'The baby!' Now, my 90-pound male, Bravo, dotes on her constantly, bringing her toys from his basket and dropping them at her feet to watch her play. He adores her."

Breeders also cite a raucous sense of humor as typical among Dobermans, which are actually quite clown-like despite their sophisticated appearance. "My first show Dobe, Ch. Bailes Beau Rikki of Rehbar, was exceptional and helped raise my three children," says Briley. "He was a total clown and a super water dog. 'Beau' certainly never knew that he was a dog-his behavior was always more human-like." Briley laughs, "He always amazed house guests by backing up next to the couch and sitting next to whomever was visiting. He loved the swimming pool and knew that once he was in, he was not supposed to go in and out. He would amuse himself by sitting on the step with a tennis ball and placing it in the jet of water from the filter, letting it float to the center. He would swim out to get it and start the process all over again. He even learned to dive from the board, and would go underwater for his tennis ball."