

Popular Dogs: Greyhounds

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Audrey Pavia

With most American Kennel Club (AKC) breeds, finding a puppy is not that hard. You simply get a list of the breeders in your area and start shopping. But if you have your heart set on getting a Greyhound puppy, you have your work cut out for you. "The popularity of racing Greyhound adoption has led to an increase in the number of people who want to purchase a Greyhound puppy," says Sue LeMieux, president of the Greyhound Club of America (GCA) and author of "The Book of the Greyhound" (TFH Publications, 2001). "More and more people are finding out what a wonderful breed it is."

However, as LeMieux points out, "because fewer than 200 AKC Greyhound puppies are born per year, prospective buyers may not have the chance to visit a breeder and pick out a puppy." One reason for the breed's low birth rate is that Greyhounds are a challenging dog to breed. "Greyhound females come into season only once a year at best and may not have their first season until they are 2 years old, so the number of breeding opportunities are small," says Andrew D. Kostic, Ph.D., a Greyhound breeder in Kingston, N.Y. "In addition, female Greyhounds are sensitive, and breeding success is relatively low compared to other more prolific breeds."

Though finding a Greyhound breeder and a puppy to call your own is a challenge, knowing what you're looking for and the right questions to ask can make it easier.

The Right Breed?

Before trying to find a Greyhound breeder, you need to determine if you really do want a Greyhound puppy. Greyhound puppies can be quite a handful. "People who have adopted older ex-racing Greyhounds are often used to a more sedate dog," says LeMieux.

"But Greyhound puppies are another story. They are often wild and crazy. They are not hyper, but they are usually full of energy for about the first 18 months. As they grow, they get bigger and stronger and faster. Imagine this big dog running around your yard at 30 miles an hour. I've even seen young Greyhounds bank off the house when making a turn! They will sometimes run up behind you, jump on you or run right into you, knocking you flat."

LeMieux also cautions that prospective Greyhound puppy owners be prepared to do lots of training and socializing. "Early training is a must with these rambunctious youngsters. If you have toddlers, this exuberance can be a problem. They can easily knock a little one down without meaning to. Only a knowledgeable dog person should bring a young Greyhound into a home with small children."

You must also have other resources besides knowledge. "Greyhounds are large dogs? to 100 pounds and as such, their space requirements are also large," says Kostic. "Imagine 2-year-old children on stilts and roller skates, and you have a rough idea of a fast-growing Greyhound pup learning balance and coordination. They also eat like large dogs with healthy metabolisms, so the food bill is going to be large, too."

Mari Roberson, a Greyhound breeder in Bloomington, Calif., also advises doing plenty of self-evaluation before seeking a greyhound puppy. "You need to first figure out what type of lifestyle you have, whether it's active, slow-paced or middle of the road," she says. "Also, think about your personality. Do you consider yourself loud or quiet? Do you want a male or female dog, remembering that male dogs lift their legs when they mature, usually on porch furniture, flowers and bushes? When thinking about getting a dog, you should match the breed and the individual dog's temperament with your lifestyle and personality. This is very important!"

On its website, the GCA warns prospective puppy buyers about some of the Greyhound's other hard-to-deal with traits. "Greyhounds are intelligent, although not necessarily always in the way you would like," states the site. "Many learn to open gates, garbage containers, etc. They are independent thinkers. Many have done well in obedience, but it takes an innovative trainer as they learn fast, but become quickly bored."

The GCA warns that Greyhounds like to jump on people and wrap their front legs over people's shoulders. "It's all done in exuberant good nature, but an 85-pound male can knock over an unsuspecting visitor," according to the GCA.

Greyhounds also value their personal space, particularly when sleeping. "If suddenly disturbed, they occasionally snap in reflex," warns the GCA. "They rarely make contact."

In addition, Greyhounds can out-eat any breed of comparable size. Moreover, they can't be trusted to run loose or stay in an unfenced yard. "If they spy a rabbit, squirrel, another dog or a child a half-mile away, they are gone in a split second to chase the game, make an acquaintance or investigate something interesting," states the GCA.

Of course, Greyhounds also have many wonderful qualities. The question is whether this breed is right for your lifestyle. The GCA suggests that only people with large, securely fenced yards; well-behaved children; a desire to keep a dog inside the home; and the financial ability to buy and feed a Greyhound attempt to own this breed.

Finding a Breeder

Take a trip to your local pet-supply chain or to a community dog event, and you are bound to see retired racing Greyhounds available for adoption. With so many adult Greyhounds needing homes, it's hard to imagine that puppies would be hard to come by. But as with any AKC breed, the pool of pet puppies comes from show breeders. And with so few AKC breeders raising Greyhounds for show, puppies are at a premium.

The trick, then, is to locate those few Greyhound breeders who are actively breeding for show and who might have pet puppies available for purchase. "Talk to the breeder on the phone," LeMieux says. "Find out the pedigree, so you'll know your dog's background. Ask if the parents were tested for any genetic health problems. Then, ask the breeder to send you photos of the pups, or better yet, request a video."

Although Greyhounds typically produce 10 to 14 puppies per litter, breeders tend to keep or place the majority of them as show and breeding prospects, so don't expect to be able to choose the puppy that immediately strikes your fancy.