

Popular Dogs: Mutts

Learn the joys of having mixed breeds.

By Farrell R. Clancy

The Joys of Mixed Breeds

A purebred puppy has parents and ancestors that all come from the same breed of dog, making it easier to predict its appearance, size and temperament as it grows into adulthood. Many purebreds have fixed genes and conform to the American Kennel Clubs (AKC) breed standard (a written description of the ideal dog for a particular breed). For example, you'll never find a 20-pound, spotted Golden Retriever because those genes aren't present in that breed. A mixed-breed puppy comes from parents and ancestors of different breeds, making each one a truly unique companion. However, if you know the parents of your mixed-breed dog, you may be able to predict a little bit about its size and behavior. Their one-of-a-kind appeal probably accounts for the popularity of mixed breeds.

Jim and Erin Lorenz of Manchester, Missouri, adopted a black Lab-Border Collie mix from the Animal Protective Association of Missouri in 2001, whom they named Cooper. "He looks like a black Lab with long hair," Jim Lorenz says. "As soon as I saw the little, black 10-week-old fuzz ball in the bottom crate, I knew he'd be ours." With much affection, Lorenz describes "Coop" as "your everyday lovable, dumb dog," who passes the time chewing sticks on their backyard hill where he surveys his domain. He has a strong streak of Lab in him, a breed known for its high-energy level. "Sometimes he just takes off like a bat out of he'll, tail snugly tucked between his legs, ears pinned back, running as fast as he can," Lorenz laughs. "He looks like a black bolt of lightning: cutting, swerving, spinning and generally going bonkers."

Because only 25 percent of the six to eight million shelter dogs and cats are purebreds, according to statistics from the Humane Society of the United States, if you adopt a dog, you're most likely going to end up with a mixed breed. Due to this overpopulation problem (some may even call it a crisis), many dog lovers couldn't bear to purchase a purebred when there are so many dogs that need homes. This is exactly how Bogey, a German Shepherd mix with a curly tail (indicative of an Alaskan Malamute or Siberian Husky mix), adopted the Montgomery family in 2001, despite their long tradition of owning only pedigreed dogs.

Sandy Montgomery of St. Louis, Missouri, along with her husband and son, spent quite a few weekends looking for a 25-pound, female dog during their local pet-supply stores adoption days. Somehow, the Humane Society representative talked them into viewing two puppies (brother and sister) that would grow to about 40 pounds. The female was sleeping soundly in the crates corner, resting after many hours of play.

The male, however, was "staring at me with those big, brown eyes, so of course I had to see him," Montgomery recalls. "When he stepped out of the crate, all I saw were legs long legs. When I took Bogey in my arms, he wrapped his paws around my neck in a hug and pressed his cheek to mine. My husband knew that was the moment it was all over we were taking this little guy home."

Bogey hasn't let them down. "He's been one of the smartest dogs we've ever had and does many tricks," Montgomery says with affection. When asked about Bogeys best trick, she laughingly says, "Manipulating us! Oh, does he do a good job!" The moral of Montgomerys story? "You don't always get what you go after, but sometimes you get much more than you could have ever hoped for," she says.

Sometimes, as in the case of Kelli Viehl of Edwardsville, Illinois, you spontaneously take home a 60-pound ball of white fur to your unsuspecting husband. Although she never really considered herself a dog person, on the same day she unexpectedly quit her job (which was located next to a shelter), she also fell in love with a Great Pyrenees mix from across the parking lot.

"As soon as I saw those beautiful eyes, accented by heavy black eyeliner, I knew I was about to become a dog owner,"



Viehl recalls. "Because my husband had been traveling in Europe on business, wed been playing phone tag for two days due to a hectic schedule and the time difference. So when I became an unemployed dog owner whose husband didn't know about either, I was desperately hoping I wouldn't be a divorced unemployed dog owner when he arrived home and found out about my eventful day."

Lucky for her, Viehl has an understanding husband who also fell head-over-heels for Wrigley (named for the Chicago Cubs baseball teams playing field). "I'm living proof that a cute, quirky dog can make you do crazy things," Viehl concludes.