

## Jack Russell Terriers

**Jack Russell Terriers need a lot of activity and a job. They are born hunters..**

*Nikki Moustaki*

### Little Body, Busy Mind

"I'm ready for my close up," may well be the Parson or Jack Russell Terriers mantra, strutting down the red carpet, hamming it up for the paparazzi. We all know Skip, the dog who plays Eddie on the television show, *Frasier*, and Soccer, the star of the television show *Wishbone*, and are charmed by countless other JRTs on television and in the movies. This breed has proven itself to be a highly trainable, faithful companion -- a dog that has the perfect balance of everything you could ask for in a pet. Wait a minute -- that's in front of the camera. Eddie listens every time his owner calls, and *Wishbone* loves playing dress-up. There's not a hair out of place on these television dogs. Is that what its really like living with a JRT?

"This breed is the loaded gun of the dog world," says Catherine Romaine Brown of Livonia, New York, who has been involved with the breed for 20 years and is the author of *The Jack Russell Terrier: Courageous Companion* (Howell, 1998), and *The Jack Russell Terrier: An Owner's Guide to a Happy, Healthy Pet* (Howell, 1996). "They are still hunting dogs bred for courage and to deal with formidable quarry. This breed can be trained, but never depend on them to hand it over 100 percent of the time unless it's on their terms and there's something in it for them."

Perhaps we can't believe everything we see on television. There are, of course, many great aspects of living with a JRT, but the negatives can sometimes outweigh the positives to an owner who isn't prepared for this feisty dog's energy, tenacity and willpower. Read on to see if a JRT is the right companion for you.

### Energy to Spare

To say that the JRT is not a couch potato is a grand understatement. The JRT would mangle the couch -- and the potato, too -- before anyone could accuse this dog of being lazy. The JRT's vigorous enthusiasm, combined with its obsessive nature and its vital hunting instinct, make it a tough dog to contain. "I have known of more than one terrier who would run to the top of a flight of stairs, push a ball over the edge and catch the ball before it got to the bottom. The behavior would go on for hours. If nobody plays or works with them on their terms, these dogs invent games," says Brown. "One fall I grew an enormous pumpkin and my dogs worked on it until they got a hole in it. They played inside it and eventually chewed it into tiny pieces, then mush. The huge pumpkin provided hours of entertainment."

But what if you don't have a pumpkin patch? Beware the JRT with nothing to do all day. This is a dog that needs a lot of activity and a job. It is a born hunter, and a hunter without quarry will certainly find something else to shoot. "Most JRTs are extremely active and if no release is provided for this energy, they can become destructive, tearing apart walls, furniture and clothing," says Debbie Britt-Hay of Poway, California, author of *Jack Russell Terriers for Dummies* (IDG Books, 2000). "Some can suffer from separation anxiety, in which they basically lose their minds with worry about being separated from their owners, and become a walking demolition in the process. They are intelligent and sometimes defiant, and some owners simply aren't equipped to deal with this type of intellect."

For those who like to play, the JRT is indeed the ideal companion -- the dog is tireless and loves to please, making it a great candidate for canine sports. If you don't have time for sports, however, a simple game of fetch or toss the stick will do just fine. "I'd have to say that stick is my dogs favorite amusement. He never wants to stop. When it's time to come in, he will hold on to the stick with his jaws and let my husband carry him hanging by the stick back to the house," says Coleen Michele Coon, a JRT shorty owner from Barnegat, New Jersey.

A shorty is a JRT with shorter legs and a longer back, usually about 10 to 12 inches in height at the withers (top of shoulders). The standard for the American Kennel Clubs (AKC) Parson Russell Terrier does not recognize these shorter dogs, but the Jack Russell Terrier Club of America (JRTCA) leaves room in its standard for the variable heights and builds within the breed. The United Kennel Club also has a bred standard for shorties under the Russell Terrier name.

"I was told by many people that JRTs are hyper and hard to train. The shorty, however, was bred specifically to be a house pet versus a hunting dog, and is known for its wonderful temperament. This was exactly what I was looking for," Coon says.

No matter the length of the legs, the JRT loves its human, and would much rather expend its boundless energy playing with someone, than playing alone. "This breed's favorite part of any activity is your interaction with them in the game," says Donevon Campiotti-Murrell, a JRT owner from Merced, California. "For instance, mine all love to be squirted with the water hose, and their favorite part is me doing the spraying. Once, I bought them a toy sprinkler designed for kids. I hooked it up, turned it on, and thought, "Oh, they're going to love this, they can play in it any time they want. Much to my surprise they looked at it, sniffed it and turned their noses up at it. Then they all ran to the attached nozzle and looked at me as if to say, 'Come on, lets play!' That was \$10 down the drain."

#### Typical Terriers

Terriers, in general, were bred to hunt small game. The JRT was bred to hunt animals its own size or larger, specifically foxes, but it will hunt just about anything scuttling about on four feet, though birds aren't safe either. The pet JRT doesn't have a fox hole to conquer, so it will make do by destroying things you value unless you offer another alternative. "We have about 50 dead squeaky fleece toys in the dog's toy box. This reflects the JRTs personality -- they're like addicts in their tenacity," says Campiotti-Murrell. "However, my dogs never hurt one hair on my three-legged cats body, they have not destroyed anything outside of normal puppy chewing and they have learned every behavior I have attempted to teach them."

Many JRT owners find that other household pets and the JRT can clash, leading to the demise of small rodents and birds. If it looks like quarry to a JRT, it will be treated as quarry, even if Fluffy the hamster is a cherished member of the family.

Small animals outside aren't safe either, though the local squirrels pose more of a threat to the JRT than it does to them. "See you later," these dogs seem to say as they throw you the paw on their way to danger. "JRTs are fearless to a fault. Their fearlessness gets them into a lot of trouble. That obedience-trained terrier won't hear the recall command (come) when it runs across the road in front of a semi-truck. If it sees a chipmunk on the other side of the road, it won't see the truck coming at it, nor will it choose to hear you call," says Brown.

"Some of these dogs are next to impossible to keep contained," continues Brown. "JRTs are the ultimate escape artists of the canine world. They can climb almost human-like over fences and dig deep holes to get out. I have one dog that can pull open chain link to escape if he sets his mind to it."

Sally Yancey, a JRT owner from Greensboro, North Carolina, says that a fenced yard is a must for the JRT, a dog that's a car magnet due to its high hunting drive. "They chase and don't look where they're going, or they go too far and become lost. I once saw a JRT holding a poisonous snake at bay and there wasn't a thing I could do about it -- the dog was not going to leave its quarry," says Yancey.

Having a safe place where the JRT can run free is great for these energetic terriers, but the dogs must be reliable with the recall command or off-leash romping can be risky.