

Pomeranians

These small dogs make a big impression in the lives of everyone they meet.

By Susan McCullough

I'll never forget Pompey. Every afternoon, he and his owner would walk past my house to the street corner, then turn around and walk back. The owner was an elderly gentleman, and his eyesight was failing. His body was hunched over, and his footsteps and attitude were cautious and tentative. But Pompey's demeanor was just the opposite: He'd always briskly trot several feet in front of his owner and puff his chest out in apparent pride. His dark, button-like eyes took in everything, and his copper-colored coat shone in the late-afternoon sun.

And woe to any person who ever knocked at the elderly gentleman's front door. The gentlest knock would trigger a torrent of just-what-are-you-doing-here barking from Pompey, who was just on the other side of the door. The barking would subside only when the door was opened.

Pompey only weighed about 5 pounds, if that, but he clearly considered himself to be the biggest, most important dog in the world. Then again, he was a Pomeranian.

Who You Calling "Little"?

Pomeranian devotees love the fact that these little dogs seem to have outsized views of themselves. "They have a bit of the 'little-dog syndrome,'" acknowledges Karen Betz, a Pom breeder from Arcadia, California. "They don't know that they are little dogs."

Dorothy Martin, the judges education coordinator for the American Pomeranian Club, believes that their small sizes don't prevent Pomeranians from seeing themselves as kings (or queens) of the hill. "Our own Ch. La Cherie's Lil Luke Skywalker went into the show ring always knowing that he owned the place," recalls Martin, who lives in York, South Carolina.

Although the Pom's big-dog attitude is encased in a very small body — generally no more than 7 pounds — the dog's diminutive size holds big advantages for an owner. "It's easier to have small dogs," Betz says. "You can potty train them with litter boxes or potty pads, so you don't have to worry about them during the day inside your house. They travel easily and love to go out and be the center of attention. I generally take one or two with me to certain stores or malls that allow dogs. They're a people attractor."

Darlene Arden, author of *Small Dogs, Big Hearts: A Guide to Caring for Your Little Dog* (Howell Book House, 2006), notes that although the Pom is quite active, the dog's small size makes fulfilling his need for exercise relatively easy for even a sedentary owner. "They're fun little dogs who need exercise but not in the extreme," says Arden, who lives in Framingham, Massachusetts.

Still, there are some downsides to the Pom's small stature: Chiefly, the risk of inadvertent injury when interacting with large or careless individuals. "They are quite small and require an owner who can let them be dogs while also watching out for [those] who can cause injury to a little dog," Arden says.

Some Poms are willing to wrestle with animals that are bigger than they are — a delusion of grandeur that could have disastrous consequences for one of these petite pooches. "It's not good that they're not afraid to attack a larger dog," Arden warns. "It could be lethal to the little Pom."

Great Communicators

Pompey, the Pomeranian I met in my neighborhood, exemplified his breed's reputation for being very talkative — "although most people would call it barking," Arden acknowledges. "But a Pom has to tell you that the grass is growing, leaves are on the trees and someone is coming to the door. Early training helps with this."

Betz agrees, and as an owner of several Poms, she often experiences Pom chatter at high-decibel levels. "When you have more than one, it's difficult to deal with a lot of high-pitched barks at the same time," she says.

Fortunately, though, not every Pomeranian is a barker. Connie Zieba of Taylor Lake Village, Texas, notes that of her two

Pomeranians, only one seems to like yapping. “The other Pom is not a barker at all, but my male makes up for it,” she says.

Betz says that of her present pack of Pomeranians, “I only have a couple of young ones who just bark because they like to. It’s all part of their playtime ... [and] they are protective of their family, so it’s natural for them to bark when they hear someone coming to the door or when a squirrel comes into their yard.”