

Poodles

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I love dogs, but I love Poodles with a passion. Those of you who personally have known a Poodle can understand why I feel that way. I am not alone though; Poodles have been valued and loved for centuries.

When Passion Begins

I bought my first Standard Poodle 46 years ago. I was about to have my first child and was attracted to Poodles because of their reputation as good family dogs -- good with children and yet good watch dogs. I liked their history of being easy to train, and I also liked the fact that they were reported to have an amused and amusing attitude. Just like any other novice, I picked up the newspaper and saw some puppies advertised. I went to look and came home with a black female. I was very lucky because it happened that her breeding went back to some of the most famous European and North American lines. I discovered all this later when I began to devour every book and article written about the breed.

Fortune smiled upon me and my Poodles as I worked hard to establish a line of Standards and also became involved in breeding Toys and Miniatures. One of my breeding, the black Standard female Ch. de Russy Lollypop, was top-winning dog of all breeds in 1969. After that, I turned my focus to judging, and I have been honored with assignments all over the world and at the most prestigious shows in the United States. Whatever my activities, I have never been without at least one Poodle and, as I said earlier, I have not been alone in my love for them.

A Hint of History

Thanks to illustrations and works of art, we know that Poodles existed in the 15th and 16th centuries. The development of the Poodle into the form we recognize today began during the 17th century. In Germany it was known as the Pudel, which means to splash in the water. In Russia the Poodle predecessor was more of a Greyhound type. In France the Poodle predecessor was large and built to retrieve birds from the water. There were Poodle-type dogs in Northern Italy as well.

In those early times, the Poodle-type dog was so popular that everyone wanted to claim its origins. Somehow the French prevailed and the term French Poodle has survived today, although this term is not popular with fanciers in the United States. Whatever its origin, this Poodle-type dog was a great water dog and was valued because it was intelligent and cooperative. It had all the physical characteristics required in a good water retriever, but it was the Poodle's ability to connect with its human companion that distinguished it from any other breed. It is this ability that characterizes the Poodles of today.

Many people liked all of the characteristics of the Poodle but wanted it in a package smaller than the original Standard, thus miniaturization of the breed began to make it more widely useful as a pet and companion.

The Miniature size was firmly established by the 18th century; the Toy variety was developed in the 20th century. No matter what size a Poodle might be, though, people are charmed and that keeps the Poodle in demand with the general public as well as breeders and show fanciers.

Yes, Poodles have been popular over the centuries; however, in 1930 there were only 34 Poodles registered in America. Then in 1935, a white Standard, International Ch. Nunsoe Duc de la Terrace of Blakeen, was the first Poodle to win Best in Show at the famous Westminster Kennel Club show in New York. Not only did the Poodle win, he was handled by his owner, Mrs. Hayes Blake Hoyt, who with this win became the first woman ever to win Best in Show at this show. Duc, as he was called, was brought over to the United States from Europe by Mrs. Hoyt, whose kennel name was Blakeen. (Using a kennel name in naming or registering a dog is common practice.) Stemming from that first Best in Show, the popularity of the Poodle exploded and it became the number one breed registered by the American Kennel Club for two decades.

Currently, the Poodle retains its popularity remaining, in the top 10 because dedicated breeders have been careful to preserve the basic personality and characteristics of the breed. Just to introduce you to the Poodle, here are key Poodle traits.

The Jokester Poodle

The Poodle breed standard states that the Poodle has an air of distinction, but what I like best is that it has a well-developed sense of humor. If a Poodle is doing something that makes people laugh, it will continue to do that whether its right or wrong. This sensitivity to the pleasure of humans, plus Poodles willingness and intelligence, has shaped their careers as circus dogs and helped to preserve the breed.

Years ago, I learned my lesson on laughing. A Standard and I were going through graduation exercises at an obedience class, and as we came to a halt during the heeling exercise, my dog sat in a perfect heel position but facing backward -- that was, after all, the location of the audience!

I couldn't help laughing, which meant I had to do some retraining to convince her that I was not really amused. She learned quickly and went on to hold a record of accomplishment as a dog that never failed an exercise in obedience competition. She had conformation points as well, but she was bored silly with it -- she was a conformation dropout.