

## Popular Dogs: Weimaraners

**This complex, highly athletic breed can be sweet yet demanding, obedient yet naughty, lovable yet challenging.**

*By Diane Morgan*

Despite its nickname, the Gray Ghost, there's nothing wraithlike about the Weimaraner, except for its haunting beauty and slightly spooky gaze. Don't expect your Weim to glide silently through the house like a dim shadow. This breed is so vibrantly alive that it's almost overwhelming. In fact, for some people it is overwhelming. This exuberant, powerful, fiercely intelligent dog is one that makes its presence known. Ignore or neglect it at your peril. Furthermore, the Weimaraner is not one dog, but many. Like the quicksilver it so resembles, your Weim slides, squiggles and darts through myriad roles, putting its heart into each before discarding it and becoming a new and equally amazing animal. It all happens right before your eyes.

Partly, you can thank the Germans for this. The Weimaraner, as its name suggests, is a German-bred dog. The parsimonious Germans, not wanting two dogs where one would do, attempted in most of their breeding efforts to produce an all-purpose dog. (They were assisted in this endeavor by the German government, which put a tax on each dog owned.) At any rate, German breeders succeeded admirably with the Gray Ghost whose various manifestations include hunter, guardian, companion and friend.

It's also more than a little bit of a devil. You may, in fact, think the beast has been possessed. But I submit that it is the Gray Ghost that will entirely possess you, instead, heart and soul.

### The Sporting Life

Weims have a powerful hunting instinct and prey drive (instinct to chase and hunt small furry or feathered animals) that sometimes override all other priorities. Originally, the breed was expected to hunt animals as large as bears and wolves. In the United States, they're usually used for birds, although as Cheryl Potter of Frederick, Maryland, says, "My Weims have brought me rabbits, groundhogs and even a few field mice."

Mara Wildfeuer of Mountain View, California, the breeder-referral contact and past-president for the Sacramento Valley Weimaraner Club, says: "Many people get the wrong impression of Weimaraners from photographer William Wegman's gorgeous photos. Most Weims are not content to sit around, be dressed up and photographed. They were bred to work in the field with their hunters all day."

That's right — all day. This breed was meant to hunt all day, and its relentless energy requires an outlet. Dozens of Weim owners around the country told me the same thing, and after about the 10th interview, I figured there might be something to it.

Wildfeuer continues, "My first Weim, June Bug, was my trail-riding companion. She would accompany me on a 10-mile horseback ride and probably do half again as many miles herself going up and down the trail. She never trailed the horses and was always up ahead. Once, after we returned home from a long ride, I picked up a leash to put it away, and she was up and ready to head out again on whatever new adventure I had planned." Wildfeuer and her dogs participate in obedience, agility, conformation, tracking and therapy-dog visits, too.

This is what I mean; you have to keep these dogs busy. In case none of the above activities interests you, you can try hunting or flyball. Weims are naturals in those sports. A Weimaraner can never be just a pet if by pet you mean a lazy dog that is content to lie around the house all day and watch you eat. Weimaraner is not the German word for "couch potato."

Don't be fooled by the chiseled elegance and aristocratic grace of this super-dog. Weims are fun-loving and full of spirit (the ghostly element again). "Many a night we turn off the TV and watch the Weims instead," says Debbie Gross of Fairfield, California. "Until you own one you have no idea."

This is a dog that wants to participate with you in your activities — it's not enough just to be in the same room with it. The Weimaraner is strong willed and powerful, and if you don't make yourself the leader of the pack, it'll take over the job. Weims want to hunt, hike and participate in canine sports, such as agility. If you don't have the time, energy or inclination for this kind of stuff, consider another breed.

“People often don't do the research into the amount of exercise and training Weimaraners need and find themselves hopelessly out of their league,” Wildfeuer says. They not only need exercise, they demand it. Young Weims in particular are known for their exuberant jumping. (And these dogs can jump!) This bouncing stage may last until the dog is 2 years old, so be prepared, and think about ways you can take advantage of this pogo-like activity. Perhaps you need some help retrieving something from atop the refrigerator?