

Life with a Frenchie

You don't have to speak a foreign language to get along with these little guys.

Susan McCullough

Sometimes, knowing just a little bit about a breed's history can yield some hints as to what modern-day life with a dog of that breed is like. That's certainly true of the French Bulldog, which originated to meet the needs of two groups of 19th century women: lace makers and streetwalkers.

About 200 years ago, some lace makers in England decided they needed special canine company to sit with them while they worked. They found that relatively small Bulldogs fit the bill. A few years later, the Industrial Revolution prompted some of those lace makers to leave England and settle in France, where they hoped to find more work. Naturally, they took their little dogs with them. In time, these miniature Bulldogs began turning up in Paris, where they became great favorites with the city's prostitutes. These ladies of the night dubbed their dogs "Bouledogues Français" — or, in English, "French Bulldogs."

The Good ...

Today, of course, most French Bulldog owners neither create lace nor engage in the world's oldest profession. Still, the characteristics that might have made Frenchies such a hit with these women also offer clues as to what the rest of us might expect when living with this breed.

Likeable Lapdog: Many canine breeds were developed specifically to perform tasks for humans. Some of those tasks require prodigious amounts of energy and stamina. For example, the Golden Retriever was bred to run through chilly marsh water and fetch fallen waterfowl for his owner.

The French Bulldog also was developed for a specific purpose, but that purpose required little energy or endurance. According to breeder Janice D. Grebe, Ph.D., the 2007 president of the French Bulldog Club of America, the Frenchie was built for just one reason: to be a lapdog. However, the lace makers who appropriated Frenchies for this purpose were not merely looking for a little canine love. In that era of less-than-perfect hygiene and housekeeping, the Frenchie's warm little body was much more attractive to fleas than the human lap upon which the dog sat. In other words, the Frenchie served as a flea magnet.

Today, owners of French Bulldogs and other breeds can select a variety of tools for their flea-fighting arsenals. But the Frenchie still fits just fine on a human lap, making this breed supremely qualified to serve as a living blanket for a human couch potato.

Conversation Convert: The French Bulldog's small size, big eyes and oversized, bat-like ears are bound to elicit comments from those who view the breed for the first time. A Frenchie is the kind of "unusual, nonthreatening dog that people love to meet, greet and pet," says Deborah Wood, author of *The Dog Lover's Guide to Dating: Using Cold Noses to Find Warm Hearts* (Howell Book House, 2003). "If you're a single dog lover, it may be a great way to meet another single dog lover. Just maybe, your dog with those soulful eyes will help you find a two-legged soul mate."

Supremely Sociable: French Bulldogs seem to love not only the people they live with, but also just about anyone else they come in contact with. The Frenchie's sociable temperament also makes the breed suitable for therapy work.

An Easy Keeper: A busy lace maker or lady of the evening probably didn't have a lot of time to spend grooming a dog. Fortunately for them — not to mention the busy 21st-century dog owner — the French Bulldog has a short coat that makes grooming a snap: a weekly brushing, wrinkle wipe and ear cleaning is all they need.

... and the Bad

The French Bulldog may sound too good to be true, but, alas, no dog is perfect. Even Frenchies have some drawbacks.

Snoring Snags: The French Bulldog's flat face and short snout make this breed more likely than most to be a noisy sleeper. Stephani Luedde, a breeder in Springfield, Missouri, acknowledges that the breed's nocturnal noises can be disturbing, but adds that "when you love a Frenchie, you also come to love all the grunts and snorts that come along with them."

Temperature Temperamental: Like other flat-faced breeds, the Frenchie is very sensitive to heat. "What you may think is a nice cool day could be dangerous for a Frenchie who has been taken for a car ride or to play at the park," Luedde warns.

Anesthesia Anxiety: Frenchies are "very sensitive to the type of anesthesia they can tolerate," Luedde says. "The wrong type of anesthesia could kill a Frenchie."

Fragility Facts: Frenchies' relatively short backs mean that "they need to be kept from jumping off of things," says breeder Brenda Buckles of Prairie Village, Kansas. "And their short necks mean that you cannot pull and tug with toys or collars too quickly or too severely."

However, such disadvantages are miniscule when compared with the joys that are part of life with a French Bulldog, a dog that's cuddly, sociable, easygoing and easy-to-care-for. A person need not be an English lace maker or a French lady of easy virtue to appreciate living with a Frenchie.