

First Dog Gets Ready for Public Debut

Criticism flares because Bo doesn't fulfill President Obama's plan to get a "mutt like me."

Posted: April 13, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

The new first dog Bo is scheduled for a formal introduction to the public Tuesday, but his picture has already been published by most media outlets.

The black-and-white Portuguese Water Dog was a gift from Sen. and Mrs. Ted Kennedy to the Obama girls, Sasha and Malia. The 6-month-old puppy's breed appealed to the Obama family because of the low-shed factor, since daughter Malia has allergies.

"They were looking at shelters, but in the end the Kennedys learned of this littermate of their dog who needed a home and they wanted to give the girls a gift — and here we are!" an Obama spokeswoman told the Chicago Sun Times.

Bo's arrival puts to rest months of anticipation from various animal organizations that were eager to see the president make good on his word that the new puppy would be "a mutt like me." When reports surfaced that the dog was not adopted from a shelter, the criticism started.

Madeline Bernstein, president of spcaLA, expressed her disappointment Monday in a Letter to the Editor, stating: "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (spcaLA) is dismayed by the decision of the White House to obtain a purebred dog ... Choosing a shelter dog would have saved lives."

The American Kennel Club, however, congratulated the Obama family on its decision and welcomed Bo to the White House. "With one of the American Kennel Club's primary missions being the encouragement of responsible dog ownership, we are delighted with the wonderful example you have already set in researching the right breed for your family and obtaining a dog through a reputable breeder who is a member of the AKC parent club, the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America," said AKC President and CEO Dennis Sprung in a letter to the Obama family.

The Obama family's choice of a PWD prompted the breed's national club to remind the public about responsible breeding and dog ownership. This has been the most attention that the breed has received since its introduction into the United States in the late 1960s, according to the club.

"While the PWD is a wonderful family pet, we want to use the increased interest in the breed as an opportunity to educate people about it," said Stu Freeman, president of the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. "We encourage those who may consider adding a Portuguese Water Dog to their lives to do the proper research to ensure that this breed fits their lifestyle."

The puppy was bred by Art and Martha Stern, long-time breeders who live near Dallas, Texas. Bo is a littermate of Sen. Kennedy's pup Cappy. Bo's original family returned him because he turned out to not be the right fit for them.

Want to read all about what led up to the Obamas' decision to get a Portuguese Water Dog? [Click here.](#)