

What to Expect From an Obama Dog

The Portuguese Water Dog is a high-energy working dog with significant grooming needs.

By Eve Adamson

Posted: April 15, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

The secret is out! President Obama has fulfilled his campaign promise to daughters Malia and Sasha by choosing the family's first dog and the nation's first dog, too: a Portuguese Water Dog puppy named Amigo's New Hope. You can call him Bo.

After laborious research, the Obamas chose the curly-coated working breed — once a hard-working fisherman's dog — because of its non-shedding coat, in consideration of Malia's allergies. Sen. Ted Kennedy also reportedly played a role. The senator has three of his own Porties: Splash, Sunny, and Cappy (Cappy is Bo's brother), and the Obamas spent time with Kennedy's dogs, getting to know the breed. Kennedy gave Malia and Sasha the puppy as a gift after the Obamas gave the breed the thumbs-up.

"The Obamas did everything first-time dog owners should do before choosing a new puppy," said American Kennel Club spokesperson Lisa Peterson.

Bo behaved swimmingly during several top-secret White House interviews with the family, committing not even one faux paw, but that's because the puppy has already experienced weeks of good-manners training and socialization. Should you be thinking about adding a Portuguese Water Dog to your own family, be aware that your puppy probably won't come pre-trained like Bo. Other things you should know:

Portuguese Water Dogs are high energy. "This breed is intelligent and they can be rambunctious. They need daily vigorous exercise and a lot of attention to stay occupied and happy," Peterson says. A great way to meet those needs is through training. "Be prepared to train the dog throughout its life, to keep it mentally active," Peterson says. "They need a firm but fair voice and a job to do — every day."

Portuguese Water Dogs require significant grooming. It's the trade-off for a non-shedding coat. They need weekly brushing and combing, plus a bath, blow-dry, and clipping or scissoring every two to three weeks, according to the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America. Many pet owners have their Porties professionally groomed every 6 to 8 weeks, which can be costly.

Portuguese Water Dogs are healthy, but ... Every breed is prone to certain health issues. Good breeders test the parents of their litters for hip dysplasia, eye diseases, and GM-1 (a rare but fatal inherited metabolic disorder), and should also talk frankly with potential buyers about other health issues that occasionally occur.

Ready to run, play, swim, or offer an opinion on presidential decisions, the Portuguese Water Dog is no wallflower. Bo is sure to keep the Obama family active for many years to come. If you bring a Portuguese Water Dog into your life, prepare for just the same.

"This is a happy breed with a wagging tail, and they build strong bonds with their family," Peterson says. "Let them be a part of it and you'll see what a versatile and adaptable breed the Portuguese Water Dog can be."

Eve Adamson is a DOG FANCY contributing editor.

To read more about the Obama family's new puppy, [click here](#).