

Lab Is Still America's Sweetheart

Retriever holds top spot in breed popularity contest for 19th year in a row.

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For the 19th consecutive year, the Labrador Retriever is the most popular purebred dog in America, but the German Shepherd Dog is nipping at its heels.

In its annual survey of dog registrations, the American Kennel Club said the German Shepherd overtook the Yorkshire Terrier as the second most popular breed. The German Shepherd has not held a position that high in the ranking in more than three decades.

An American favorite since the time of Rin Tin Tin, the German Shepherd Dog became the number one breed of the 1920s, but then slipped in popularity until after World War II.

The top 10 breeds are as follows: Labrador Retriever German Shepherd Dog Yorkshire Terrier Golden Retriever Beagle Boxer Bulldog Dachshund Poodle Shih Tzu

"Labs have been America's top dog for nearly two decades due to their loyal and gentle nature," said AKC Spokesperson Lisa Peterson. "But the German Shepherd Dog has gained ground recently, quite possibly due to the increased attention they receive for their security efforts at home and abroad. Hailed as the world's leading police, guard and military dog, this energetic and fun-loving breed is a loyal family pet, ideal companion and dependable K-9 partner when duty calls."

Labradors, Golden Retrievers and Beagles are also working breeds used by law enforcement, military and homeland security personnel for tasks ranging from border patrol, bomb and narcotics detection to searching for missing persons and tracking down fugitives.

These four breeds were developed for various forms of hunting or herding, but the traits that made them so effective at these jobs — such as strong scenting ability of the Beagle, the eager-to-please attitude of the Golden Retriever and Labrador, and the bold nature of the German Shepherd — make them effective in their careers today.

"Despite advances in security technology, the canine and its unique abilities remain a valued resource for the military and law-enforcement agencies that work to keep us safe," said Peterson. "The loyalty, intelligence and hardworking nature which make these breeds desirable as K-9 partners in the field also contribute to their status as valuable companions in the hearts of dog owners around the nation."

Though the Lab is still in the top spot overall, it is slowly losing ground, especially when the favorites are counted by town or city. The German Shepherd ranks first in Detroit, Honolulu, Memphis and Miami. The Yorkshire Terrier is the top dog in New York and Philadelphia. In Los Angeles, the Bulldog is the favorite breed.

Unusual breeds on local top five lists include the Bull Terrier (1st in Newark), the Mastiff (4th in Des Moines, Iowa), the Miniature Pinscher and Shetland Sheepdog (3rd and 5th, respectively, in Richmond, Va.) and the Chihuahua (3rd in Honolulu).

In the past 10 years, the dogs that have jumped in ranking are the Bulldog (from 21st to 7th); French Bulldog (from 73rd to 24th); Cavalier King Charles Spaniel (from 58th to 25th) and the Havanese (from 92nd to 32nd).

A trend toward easy-to-groom breeds has also arisen in the last decade with the rise of the Mastiff (from 39th to 27th) and the Rhodesian Ridgeback (from 56th to 48th) as well as the decline of higher maintenance breeds such as the Komondor (from 132nd to 154th), the Puli (from 123rd to 149th), the Irish Terrier (from 108th to 132nd) and Sealyham Terrier (from 138th to 157th).

Among rare breeds on the decline are the Curly-Coated Retriever (from 114th to 142nd), the Sussex Spaniel (from 135th to 159th) and the Irish Water Spaniel (from 130th to 150th).

Even before President Barack Obama and his family welcomed a Portuguese Water Dog as a gift from the late Sen. Edward Kennedy, the breed was on the rise in popularity from 80th a decade ago to 60th currently. However, it did move



up from 64th a year ago when all the interest in this mid-sized, hypoallergenic breed began.

Dog lovers can see and learn more about all of their favorite breeds on Saturday, February 6 when the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship — where the country's top dogs compete for \$225,000 in prize money and the title of "National Champion" — airs on Animal Planet and the Discovery Channel from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. (ET/PT). AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence honorees, which include the Golden Retriever "Robin" in the Law Enforcement category, will also be part of the program.