



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE GETTING A DOG



Once you've decided to welcome a dog into your family, there remains the issue of choosing the right one. Male or female? Pedigree or mongrel? Large or small? Don't forget, however, that every dog is an individual and that its behaviour will often be different from what is considered typical. In addition to genetics, a key role will be played by the animal's experiences, as determined by its surroundings both as a growing puppy and as an adult. As such, before choosing your dog you should get to know its unique character and decide whether the dog and its habits will fit into your own personal environment.

Likewise, a dog's size is no indication of the amount of time a dog will require or its attitude. A large dog will not necessarily need more exercise than a small one. And large or small, a dog's life will always be centred around its human owner. Even if you do have a big garden, this can never replace the experience of a dog and its human companion sharing a walk together. For man's best friend, a walk means a lot more than just exercise – it's about spending time with its human, discovering new and exciting scents and socialising with other dogs.

A few key issues requiring serious consideration before getting a dog:

- **Job:** how much of my time does my job take up? Do I spend most of the day away from home? Would my dog be alone at such times or can I take it with me? Does my job repeatedly require me to schedule days away from home (business trips and the like), during which my dog and I would be apart?
- **Children:** when dogs and children live together, a lack of knowledge and experience on the part of the children will from time to time result in incidents with potentially bad consequences. Very often, the dog then ends up being given away. Children tend to be lively, often placing dogs under great strain without realising it. And because children will frequently fail to recognise and understand warning signals from the dog – growling etc – it is vital to avoid leaving them alone together!
- **Parents:** it is essential for you to explain to your children how to deal correctly with dogs, laying down certain rules. For example, the dog must not be disturbed while eating, and it must have a spot to which it can withdraw at any time.

- **Accommodation:** do you live in an urban flat with only a few green spaces nearby? Dogs are running animals by nature – given the choice, they'd spend a large portion of each day in motion. An adequate amount of outdoor exercise and the opportunity to play with other dogs are among their basic needs and cannot be fulfilled by the daily trip round the block.
- **Leisure time:** do your leisure activities fit in with a dog's needs? Will you be able to share a lot of activities? What do you expect from your holidays? When families go travelling, dogs prefer to go with them – but air travel generally and certain countries are not suitable for them. Will you be able to find common ground?
- **Responsibility:** have I really taken on board that a dog can have a life expectancy of 15 years or more? You have to be capable of playing an essential role in its life and providing a secure and structured family environment for a long time. In short, getting a dog is not a decision to be taken lightly. The sweet little puppy who steals your heart at a glance will soon be a full-grown dog. Does it really deserve, on the basis of a passing human whim, to have that secure family framework so vital to it stripped away at some later date?
- **Pedigree dogs:** before obtaining a pedigree dog produced by extreme breeding, take a step back and think it over. Any breeding programme designed to produce a pronounced change in the animal's natural appearance or behaviour will have a negative impact on its overall well-being. But even when extreme breeding is not involved, we advise against acquiring a pedigree dog.

Above: Most dogs prefer to remain undisturbed when eating.

Centre: Generally, smaller dogs live to around 15 years of age, but some may exceed this. The average lifespan of larger dogs is lower.

Below: Purchasing a dog which has been selectively bred for the prominence of certain, unnatural, physical traits should be avoided. Such breeds are, unfortunately, often plagued by health complaints.

