

A Few Facts About the Labrador Retriever

The Labrador Retriever is a water dog, with a thick weather resistant and waterproof coat and an "otter" tail or rudder as it is commonly referred to, as it uses it to steer like a boat's rudder when swimming. Its heavy bone structure and body type and strong legs enable the Labrador Retriever to be a powerful swimmer and strong runner - frequent exercise is needed to keep the Labrador healthy and happy. Both lovable and sociable, the Labrador Retriever is an energetic and playful companion as well as a calm house dog. Labs are extremely obedient and eager to learn. They are used as guide dogs, explosive and drug detection dogs, hunting retrievers and most important companions. The Labrador Retriever can be trained to be an excellent therapy dog. These dogs bring company and joy in nursing homes and children's health care facilities. Labradors have become the most popular breed worldwide, and have been since 1991 and this remains true to this day.

Origin

The Labrador Retriever originated from the Canadian province of Newfoundland, along the East Coast of Canada. Labradors were invented, so to speak, in the fifteenth century. They were originally used as fishing dogs by the villagers of Newfoundland. Their two distinct layers of hair - an inner layer of short fuzzy or "undercoat" hair for insulation, and a longer, coarse guard hair for shedding water made them resilient to the icy waters. Their webbed paws allow for effective swimming.

Hunting Labs

By the 1800's Labs migrated to England and then on to the United States. Here, fishing was not the required task, but retrieving ducks and other water fowl was the desired task. Hunters loved to show off their Labs, and worked with them

diligently to develop their retrieving skills. Selective breeding kept this desire to retrieve along with a good nose in the bloodlines. Hunters began to hold events where their Labs were graded according to their performance against a set standard. These were called Hunt Tests.

Field Trial Labs

Developing the perfect hunting Lab became such an obsession that a group of hunters took this to the next level. They developed standards where the Labs were graded according to their performance against other Labs, instead of against a set of written standards. This heightened the competition. As a result, breeders placed more emphasis on energy and intelligence, and usually less on looks. These Labs became long legged, hyper, and smarter. Heads and tails became a bit narrower. They are fantastic, but sometimes a bit too energetic for the family situation. Today these Labs are usually referred to as an "American" Lab.

Show Labs

Another group of individuals became interested in the looks of the Lab over the field trials, and set forth to develop the perfect looking dog. Tail and ear lengths, poundage, size, heads, coats, and other physical aspects were considered more desirable than Hunt or Field Trial requirements. Generally speaking, these Labs developed stocky bodies, shorter legs, and mammoth heads. They are paraded in Show events all over the world, and sometimes end up at the Westminster or Crufts. Intelligence and temperament can sometimes take a backseat to looks, though this is not true for all Show Labs today.

Family Labs

In the 1980's, a new category was added - this was known as the Family Lab. They were bred for health, temperament, intelligence,

looks, and the desire to retrieve, in that order. This led to a less hyper, very intelligent Lab that was better suited for the family situation. They did not have the monster heads of the show labs, or the smaller field trial heads, but developed proportional moderate block heads. Good temperament meant the Labs were great with children. They had enough energy to swim or play Frisbee, but were calm enough to crash at your feet or sleep by the fireplace. These Labs lost the desire to roam, and were much more comfortable at home.

Labrador Stats:

Height:

- Male Labrador Retrievers range from 22.5 inches to 24.5 inches.
- Female Labrador Retrievers range from 21.5 inches to 23.5 inches.

Weight:

Male Labrador Retrievers range from 85 to 97 pounds. Female Labrador Retrievers range from 70 to 80 pounds. Labs are frequently allowed to become overweight, significantly increasing health risks for any canine.

Colors:

AKC accepted Labrador Retriever colors are black, yellow or chocolate. Yellow can range from almost white to what is known as red fox (dark). In the early days, black Labs with a white diamond on their chest were the most desired. (This has been mostly bred out by the Show Lab breeders). Yellow Labs were tolerated. Chocolates, however, were not. They were first suspected as a genetic mistake. The accepted practice of the day was to drown them, therefore removing them from the gene pool. By the early 1970's, genetics had proven that chocolates were just as pure as blacks or yellows. Chocolates suddenly became one of the most desired dogs in the world. The problem was

their recessive genes had nearly been eradicated after 500 years of persecution, leaving very few Labs capable of producing chocolates. Breeders, in their haste to make good with this sudden market demand, began breeding anything that was brown and had four legs, calling them "Chocolate Labs". (The Chesapeake Bay Retriever seemed to be the favored stand in.) AKC papers were a dime a dozen, and only as good as the breeder's word. This led to dilution of the chocolate Lab gene pool, leading to the false impression that chocolates were dumb, hyper and temperamental. A pure chocolate is as smart and well tempered as the black or yellow Labradors.

Coat:

Labrador Retrievers have a short, straight, and dense coat. Their coat is easily cared for with once a week grooming. They do shed, usually twice a year in normal climates so be sure to brush your Labrador regularly during these "sheds" to keep this to a minimum.

Temperament:

The Labrador Retriever is a kind, outgoing dog. They are easy to train, as they want to please. They are wonderful with children, and other pets. When choosing your Labrador puppy, be sure to check out the temperament of the parents. Although Lab's tend to have great temperaments for being around a family home and children, pay special attention to how the puppy's parents behave. Behavior traits can be inherited and good behavior in the parents can indicate the future temperament of your puppy. Lab puppies are very moldable. We like to say that when you pick up your puppy they are like a "lump" of clay, and you make them into what your perfect dog would be. They crave human companionship and attention and need to feel like they are "part of the family" to be truly happy. Their loving nature and adoration

of humans does not make them good watchdogs, however. Their bark is worse than their bite.

Health Concerns:

The Labrador Retriever is susceptible to skin allergies, epilepsy, eye diseases and joint problems. Be sure to ask for CERF and/or optigen eye certification from the breeder. Labradors can be prone to hip and elbow dysplasia which are potentially crippling abnormalities of joint formation that can be inherited from the dog's parents or relatives. An x-ray examination of both parents and as many ancestors as possible indicating that they are free of this abnormality will help you avoid this condition in your pet. The breeder should present you with OFA certification for both hips and elbows.

Life Expectancy:

The expected life span of the Labrador Retriever is 10-12 years.

Living Environment:

Labrador Retrievers need frequent exercise to stay happy and healthy. Ideally a country setting with a fenced yard works best for this high energy dog. However an urban setting with owners willing to walk and exercise them works just as well. Labrador Retrievers love the water and enjoy both swimming and retrieving. You and a tennis ball will be their best friends.

As they have a need for space and exercise, they are not ideal apartment dogs. To put your dog in a crate while going to work, or tethering one to a chain is unthinkable. They require space to move around. A lockable backyard kennel is ideal.

If you have decided that a Labrador Retriever puppy may be the right dog for your family, there are a few other things that you need to consider. You need to be aware that your Lab puppy will grow and will require proper exercise on a daily basis.

*** Do you have the space in your house to have this size dog, or a fenced in yard so that your dog can go out safely for exercise and playtime.**

*** Will you have enough time to devote to grooming, loving, exercising, and also on the training that may be required? (short term)**

***Are you willing to spend the money the keep your pet happy and healthy?**

If the answer is YES, then it may be time to start your reseach for your new Labrador puppy. Good Luck