

# ARMAC



AKITA RESCUE, MID-ATLANTIC COAST, INC.  
[WWW.AKITARESCUE.ORG](http://WWW.AKITARESCUE.ORG)

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## INTRODUCTION

Some of the information contained in the following pages may seem to be very "negative" to you. Yes, we are emphasizing the negative side of owning an Akita. This is something many owners or breeders may never tell you, and something you will rarely read in any book on the breed. We want to prepare you for the absolute worst situation.

It is very important to bear in mind that not all Akitas have any/all of the described problems/faults. Most just have one or two, if any. If you adopt from ARMAC, we will definitely advise you of your Akita's idiosyncrasies. AKITAS ARE WONDERFUL, BUT NOT PERFECT!!

If, after reading this you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the following people:

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*If a machine answers, please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible. If it is an EMERGENCY, please indicate this on the message. We all work full time jobs in addition to rescue work and cannot always return your call as quickly as we would like. Please have patience.*

## How Did Akita Rescue Start?

In 1976, the Akita Rescue Society of America (ARSA) was founded by a small group of concerned Akita owners. In the early years, only a few Akitas required the services provided by ARSA, but as the breed has grown in popularity, so has the number of Akitas coming into Rescue. Akita Rescue Mid-Atlantic Coast, Inc. (ARMAC) was a member of ARSA until 1995 when ARSA was disbanded and the Chapters of ARSA became independent rescue organizations.

ARMAC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to helping Akitas in distress. ARMAC depends entirely on tax-deductible donations to continue this work. ARMAC was founded in 1984 to serve Akitas in the Maryland, District of Columbia and Northern Virginia areas. In the early years, ARMAC took most Akitas east of the Mississippi. In recent years, with the advent of many new Akita rescue groups, they generally take dogs from the Maryland-Virginia-DC area. However space permitting, they have taken Akitas from up and down the eastern seaboard. ARMAC prefers to place dogs within a 4 hour driving distance, but have made long distance placements provided that there are experienced Akita people nearby to do house checks and follow up on the dogs.

## Where do the Akitas come from?

The majority of them are from animal shelters. When an Akita is brought into the shelter, the shelter notifies ARMAC and an ARMAC volunteer purchases the dog from the shelter. However in recent years, owners are turning more and more Akitas into ARMAC. Once the cute, little, UNTRAINED puppy grows into a very large, powerful adult, the owner does not want to face the challenge of living with an Akita. Other reasons given for relinquishing dogs are new job/longer hours, relocating, divorce, having a baby.

## What happens to the Akitas after ARMAC gets them?

Once the dog ends up in our care, they are brought up to date on health care, including spaying and neutering and live in a foster home until a suitable home can be found for it. We euthanize terminally ill or excessively aggressive dogs because these dogs are impossible to place safely. We have had Akitas spend as long as 3 or more years in our care before being adopted. We firmly believe there is a home for every one of them and it is our mission to find that home no matter how long it takes. Since its beginnings in 1984, many hundreds of purebred Akitas have been cared for and placed by ARMAC.

## Tell me about the Akitas in ARMAC's care?

We usually only take purebred Akitas, although we do take the occasional Akita mix. We get dogs of every age, from 6 weeks to 9 years, and in every color. Some are show quality. We get long coats, smaller import types and massive ones. Some dogs have been abused and must stay with us until they are rehabilitated.

## What does it cost to adopt an Akita from ARMAC?

Our adoption fees vary based on the age, health and length of time the Akita has been in rescue. Check the breakdown of ARMAC costs on the following pages.

## What are ARMAC's adoption requirements?

All potential homes are well screened. A person with experience in dealing with large dominant breeds is preferred, although we do place with novice owners. Personal and veterinary references are required and contacted. House checks are performed and the adopter must meet with at least one of the founding members of ARMAC. The adopter signs a contract agreeing to provide the dog with a fenced yard or kennel run or if no fence, the dog must be walked at least three times daily. Protection from the weather when the dog is outdoors, the basics of life (food and water), regular veterinary care, a sturdy collar and leash must be provided for the dog, and a dog license must be purchased within the first 8 weeks of ownership. Animals over the age of one year are rarely placed in a home with children under the age of 12, but exceptions have been made depending on the adopters and the dog involved.

## How do I go about adopting an Akita from ARMAC?

You call us and talk it over, read our Information Package, then complete and return the Adoption Application form. Our representatives will contact your references, getting as much information as possible in order to decide if you will provide an environment compatible with any dog we may have that is waiting for a new home. One or two ARMAC volunteers will visit you in your home in order to ask specific questions about what you want in a dog and to talk about the dogs we have available. Any potential problems we see at that time will be fully discussed and resolved. After the investigation is complete, you will be notified either that 1) We have one or more dogs you may wish to adopt; 2) We have nothing at this time that suits your needs but will notify you if such a dog comes in; or 3) We cannot place an AKITA with you at this time.

If you have been approved for adoption, you will be introduced to the AKITAS we think would suit your home and lifestyle. Each will have been spayed or neutered, and will be up-to-date on all vaccinations, heartworm negative and receiving daily preventative medication, micro-chipped, occasionally tattooed, crate trained, possibly some obedience training, and in general good health. If the dog has any physical or health problems, you will be informed prior to adoption. The AKITA will have been evaluated on its response to male and female adults, children, cats, other AKITAS, small dogs and various other stimuli. We can certainly tell you what to expect from your new dog in most situations. There is an adoption fee when you adopt; additionally, unusual expenses incurred during the investigation or adoption (for example, long distance telephone charges or shipping costs) will also be paid by the person adopting the dog. During the trial period you may return the dog, to ARMAC at any time and receive a refund of the adoption fee (but not the additional expenses). After the trial period is over, you may still return the AKITA at any time (you are actually required to return the Akita to ARMAC if you can no longer keep it), but with no refund of the adoption fee. All consultation and problem solving services offered by ARMAC volunteers are, of course, available to you as an Akita owner. ARMAC will be happy to provide references on request.

## How are contributions used by ARMAC?

Donations are used for various purposes: food, veterinary care (shots, spaying, etc.), boarding when necessary, shelter fees, occasional newspaper advertisements that help us to find good homes for the animals. There are FEW administrative costs, except the printing of this brochure that tells you about ARMAC, and the printing of our newsletter that keeps you up to date on our doings. ALL DONATIONS TO THE AKITA RESCUE MID-ATLANTIC COAST, INC. ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE!

## What other services does ARMAC offer?

- **PROBLEM SOLVING:** We offer consultation on all types of AKITA behavior problems from destructive chewing to inappropriate aggression. Our consultants, who have extensive experience in the training and rehabilitation of AKITAS, are available for emergency calls. Sometimes, a brief telephone conversation is all you need to find a solution for your problem. There is no charge for such a service: If you require more extensive assistance, such as a home visit, you may be asked to make a donation. Before you decide to give up your AKITA, why not give us a try?
- **PREVENTION:** The best way to solve a problem is to prevent it. To this end, we also offer information and advice about raising and training your AKITA. We can give you general instructions for establishing dominance without intimidating your dog, and "WHAT A WELL BROUGHT UP AKITA SHOULD KNOW." In addition, one of our consultants can evaluate your AKITA and home circumstances. Problems often arise not because the dog or home is "BAD", but because they are mismatched. We can help minimize the adverse effects of such a mismatch.
- **REFERRAL SERVICES:** Ever feel like your dog is the only AKITA your veterinarian has ever met? Wish you could buy good quality dog food cheaper? From our work with large numbers of AKITAS in various conditions of health and development, we have gathered considerable information about veterinary services in the area. Our co-operating veterinarians have become somewhat of AKITA health experts, and may be able to offer a solution to your problems. Or perhaps we can refer you to a specialist. Our members include scientific researchers and information analysts who monitor the research literature for the latest developments of relevance to AKITAS. We can also steer you to local sources for high-quality, reasonably priced dog food and other supplies. And, oh yes --- finding a good -boarding kennel or groomer will be a lot easier if you call us first!
- **PLACEMENT ASSISTANCE:** (*this service is ONLY offered to those who did not originally acquire their Akita from ARMAC*). If for whatever reason, you decide that you can no longer keep your AKITA. We hate it, but it happens. We offer two types of services to owners who have decided to place their AKITAS - help with DO-IT-YOURSELF programs, or placement through ARMAC. Because rescue services depend entirely upon volunteers and contributions, we do ask for a donation when you have received this service from us.

The DO-IT-YOURSELF programs works like this: You place ads in the local newspapers, tell everybody you can think of who might know someone who might be interested; post notices at work, in the supermarket, at school, at the Vet, or anyplace that comes to mind. We can help you compose the ad and screen telephone responses. We will also be happy to feature your dog on our web page (the dog must be spayed/neutered, up-to-date on all vaccinations and be heartworm negative with NO bite history). Once you have narrowed it down to a few good prospects, we can help you investigate them and make sure they offer a good home for your dog. Once the dog is placed, we will be a continuing resource to the new owners.

The RESCUE PLACEMENT program works like this: We will take your dog IF we have foster space available. Your AKITA must be spayed or neutered, current on all vaccinations, tests negative for heartworms and has NO bite history. Do to insurance restrictions, we are unable to take an Akita that has bitten, regardless of reason. You sign the Akita over to ARMAC along with its AKC papers (if any) and all relevant medical information (names and locations of all vets who have treated the dog). You will be

required to sign our Owner Release form which relinquishes your ownership rights in the AKITA. We will evaluate the dog's characteristics and decide what type of home he/she is best suited for. It generally takes about three to six months or longer for a dog to be placed through rescue, during which time the dog is cared for, socialized, and provided with top-of-the-line health care and refreshed on his or her obedience training.

**Average costs for an Akita dog taken into ARMAC**

**Initial Vet Costs** (all figures rounded to the nearest dollar)

Standard office visit fee	\$45 - \$65*
Heartworm diagnostics	\$30 - \$40*
Fecal testing	\$30 - \$45*
Vaccinations	\$60 - \$90*
<b>Total Routine Vet Visit</b>	<b>\$165 - \$240</b>

\* These prices represent a discount which is customarily given to ARMAC by the vets we use.

**Spay/Neuter Fees (if necessary)**

Male	\$100 - \$150**	\$225 - \$275
Female	\$140 - \$300**	\$270 - \$310

\*\* These prices are when a low-cost spay/neuter clinic is used, which is not always an option. These costs are for normal spay/neuter without complications. Rates are much higher in cases of extra long uterine horns, pregnancy, un-descended testicles, or other complications.

**Microchip and Registration**

Performed by ARMAC	\$35
Performed by Vet	\$55 - \$70*

\* These prices represent a discount which is customarily given to ARMAC by the vets we use.

Using the above figures, the initial cost for a dog that requires vaccinations, heartworm testing, fecal float, microchip, and spay/neuter with no surgical complications can range as follows:

Male (low/high)	\$300 / \$460
Female (low/high)	\$340 / \$610

**Maintenance Costs** (Based on a 30 day month)

Heartworm Prevention (given monthly)	<u>Monthly</u> \$25
Multi-Vitamins/supplements (given twice daily)	\$26
Flea/Tick prevention (given monthly)	\$15
Canned Dog Food (1/2 can daily)	\$28
Quality Dry Dog Food (4 cups daily)	\$67
Non-soy Dog Biscuits (1-2 daily)	<u>\$19</u>
<b>Total Monthly/Daily Costs:</b>	<b>\$180 (\$6 per day)</b>

**Boarding** (when necessary)

Daily Rate (low/high)	\$10 / \$25*
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\* These prices represent a significant discount customarily given to ARMAC. Prices vary based on location of kennel.

The average total costs for a healthy rescued AKITA with unknown medical history, that requires spay/neuter and is adopted in 3 months:

	<u>In Foster Home</u>	<u>In Boarding Kennel</u>
Male (low/high)	\$840 / \$1,000	\$1,740 / \$3,250
Female (low/high)	\$880 / \$1,150	\$1,780 / \$3,400

As you can see, our adoption fees barely cover the costs of caring for an Akita one month, much less the average 3-9 months, or more, an Akita usually stays in our care prior to permanent adoption. The only way that ARMAC is able to cover the difference is other funding sources such as private donations, fund-raising activities, private grants and money from the pockets of our volunteers.

# THE AKITA STANDARD

(American Kennel Club, Approved May 12, 2009)

## General Appearance

Large, powerful, alert, with much substance and heavy bone. The broad head, forming a blunt triangle, with deep muzzle, small eyes and erect ears carried forward in line with back of neck, is characteristic of the breed. The large, curled tail, balancing the broad head, is also characteristic of the breed.

## Head

Massive but in balance with body; free of wrinkle when at ease. Skull flat between ears and broad; jaws broad and powerful with minimal dewlap. Head forms a blunt triangle when viewed from above. *Fault*--Narrow or snipey head. *Muzzle*--Broad and full. Distance from nose to stop is to distance from stop to occiput as 2 is to 3. *Stop*--Well defined, but not too abrupt. A shallow furrow extends well up forehead. *Nose*--Broad and black. Black noses on white Akitas preferred, but a lighter colored nose with or without shading of black or gray tone is acceptable.

*Disqualification*-- *partial or total lack of pigmentation on the nose surface.* *Ears*--The ears of the Akita are characteristic of the breed. They are strongly erect and small in relation to rest of head. If ear is folded forward for measuring length, tip will touch upper eye rim. Ears are triangular, slightly rounded at tip, wide at base, set wide on head but not too low, and carried slightly forward over eyes in line with back of neck. *Disqualification*--*Drop or broken ears.* *Eyes*--Dark brown, small, deep-set and triangular in shape. Eye rims black and tight. *Lips and Tongue*--Lips black and not pendulous; tongue pink. *Teeth*--Strong with scissors bite preferred, but level bite acceptable. *Disqualification*--*Noticeably undershot or overshot.*

## Neck and Body

*Neck*--Thick and muscular; comparatively short, widening gradually toward shoulders. A pronounced crest blends in with base of skull. *Body*--Longer than high, as to 10 is to 9 in males; 11 to 9 in bitches. Measurement from the point of the sternum to the point of buttocks. Chest wide and deep; reaching down to the elbow, the depth of the body at the elbow equals half the height of the dog at the withers. Ribs well sprung, brisket well developed. Level back with firmly-muscled loin and moderate tuck-up. Skin pliant but not loose. *Serious Faults*--Light bone, rangy body.

## Tail

Large and full, set high and carried over back or against flank in a three-quarter, full, or double curl, always dipping to or below level of back. On a three-quarter curl, tip drops well down flank. Root large and strong. Tail bone reaches hock when let down. Hair coarse, straight and full, with no appearance of a plume. *Disqualification*--Sickle or uncurled tail.

## Forequarters and Hindquarters

*Forequarters*--Shoulders strong and powerful with moderate layback. Forelegs heavy-boned and straight as viewed from front. Angle of pastern 15 degrees forward from vertical. *Faults*--Elbows in or out, loose shoulders. *Hindquarters*--Width, muscular development and bone comparable to forequarters. Upper thighs well developed. Stifle moderately bent and hocks well let down, turning neither in nor out. *Dewclaws*--On front legs generally not removed; dewclaws on hind legs generally removed. *Feet*--Cat feet, well knuckled up with thick pads. Feet straight ahead.

## Coat

Double-coated. Undercoat thick, soft, dense and shorter than outer coat. Outer coat straight,

harsh and standing somewhat off body. Hair on head, legs and ears short. Length of hair at withers and rump approximately two inches, which is slightly longer than on rest of body, except tail, where coat is longest and most profuse. *Fault*--Any indication of ruff or feathering.

### **Color**

Any color including white; brindle; or pinto. Colors are rich, brilliant and clear. Markings are well balanced, with or without mask or blaze. White Akitas have no mask. Pinto has a white background with large, evenly placed patches covering head and more than one-third of body. Undercoat may be a different color from outer coat.

### **Gait**

Brisk and powerful with strides of moderate length. Back remains strong, firm and level. Rear legs move in line with front legs.

### **Size**

Males 26 to 28 inches at the withers; bitches 24 to 26 inches. *Disqualification*--*dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches.*

### **Temperament**

Alert and responsive, dignified and courageous. Akitas may be intolerant of other dogs, particularly of the same sex.

### **Disqualifications**

*Partial or total lack of pigmentation on nose.*

*Drop or broken ears.*

*Noticeably undershot or overshot.*

*Sickle or uncurled tail.*

*Dogs under 25 inches; bitches under 23 inches.*

## **ANIMAL PROFILE: THE AKITA**

By Barbara Bouyet (Reprinted from "Animal Review", October 1984)

This noble breed had its beginnings many hundreds of years ago in Akita Prefecture, a small region on the northern-most tip of Honshu Island in Japan. The area gave the breed its name, and us, this marvelous breed. In Japan, the dog is called "Akita Inu." "Inu" is dog in Japanese.

At one time the Akita was owned only by shoguns, those imperial leaders of a bygone era. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Akita was crossed with the "Tosa" a large fighting dog, and the resultant strain was used for dog fighting. This instinct to fight is still one of the major problems with these dogs today.

In 1931, the Akita was officially named a Japanese national monument, but during World War II, the Akita faced extinction because of food and clothing shortages. Many were clubbed to death and, had not a few concerned owners hid their dogs, the breed would probably have become extinct. Why was this magnificent Japanese national monument attacked so viciously? They were the largest breed of dog and food was scarce. Their pelts were used for clothing.

Helen Keller was responsible for bringing the Akita to this country. In 1937, while on a trip to Japan, she expressed a desire to own an Akita and she was presented with a three-month-old puppy named "Kamikaze". He became her constant companion until he died from distemper at eight months. A determined Miss Keller wrote to Japan and received a littermate to her beloved "Kami", "Kens an-go", who lived with his mistress at her estate in New York until his death in 1945.

No history of the Akita would be complete without the story of "Hachi-ko", a purebred belonging to Professor Elisabaru Ueno of Tokyo. In the early 1920's, the professor commuted by train to his work. Each day, the two of them walked to the station where Professor Ueno boarded the train each morning and arrived each evening to "Hachi-ko", who waited at the station. On May 21, 1925, "Hachiko" was waiting, but the professor never arrived. Hours earlier, he'd died of a stroke. Relatives took care of "Hachi-ko", but each day the dog faithfully waited at the Shibuya station for his master's return. He continued to wait, in vain, until his death in 1934, at the age of 11 years. Because of his devotion and faithfulness, a bronze statue of "Hachi-ko" stands today at the Shibuya station, a monument to a forever-faithful Akita.

Serious breeding of the Akita in this country began in the 1950's and 1960's. Today the breed is found in nearly every state, but California is where the breed started. The American Kennel Club recognized the Akita in 1973, and sadly, the Akita has now become the "fad dog" of the 80's.

### **A DOG OF STRENGTH AND SUBSTANCE**

"Large, powerful and alert, with much substance and heavy bone" is the way the AKITA standard describes the breed. The average female Akita of good breeding will stand at approximately 24 inches or more and weigh about 75-90 pounds. Males are a third larger, usually 26 to 27 inches or more and weigh 90-110 pounds at maturity. A dog of such size and strength must be controlled early, before they ever attain their great size and the AKITA MUST BE CONTROLLED!

An adult Akita is dignified, aloof and aggressive, while an Akita puppy is playful, affectionate and adorable, resembling a bear cub. Because they are friendly and open to socialization as puppies, all Akita puppies must be well socialized so they can grow into calm, well-adjusted adults. You cannot simply put an Akita puppy into a yard, feed him and ignore him, as many people wrongly do with other breeds. Akita puppies must be taken out for walks to shopping centers, through parking lots, parks and busy streets. Allow strangers to pet and fuss over them, always assuring the experience is positive. Invite friends and relatives into your home and allow them to play with and pet the youngster. As the Akita puppy grows, he will seek

these relationships less and less. His aloofness will increase with age, so it's vitally important that the puppy be well socialized.

### **THE AKITA'S FIGHTING INSTINCT MUST BE TEMPERED WITH OBEDIENCE TRAINING**

As early as four months old, the Akita puppy should be entered into an obedience class with other dogs, a perfect opportunity to set up situations where you can correct your dog's aggression towards other dogs. The Akita's instinct to fight is never fully overcome, but you can control him to some degree with training.

Kuma, a very large five-year-old male lived in the Akita Rescue kennel. Kuma was turned into Akita Rescue by his owner, who claimed that Kuma regularly sailed over his fence to kill every dog within a three-mile radius of his home. At first, he could not be kenneled near another dog and the kennels on either side of him were left empty. After months of working with him, he permitted a female to live near him. This big, powerful Akita loves people, but his instinct to fight was never tempered, controlled or corrected and he became a killer.

Usually Akitas will demand submission from another dog and let it go at that, but some are interested only in fighting. Two males rarely live harmoniously together and two females are just as difficult. A male will live with a mate but the male must be dominant and establishing his dominance can lead to some noisy but harmless arguments between the pair – rather like husbands and wives! To dominate the female, the male will usually knock her down and sit on her, demonstrate first rights to the water bowl and so on. Akitas of either sex can fit into a home with another breed of dog, just as long as the other is of the opposite sex. There are exceptions. A young two-year-old Akita lives with and loves a mixed breed shepherd, both are males. The shepherd was there first and welcomed the Akita puppy. Growing up with the male dog, the Akita never considered his docile friend a threat to his territorial rights and they get along well, but this is a very rare circumstance.

### **THE AKITA WILL LEAD, IF NOT LED BY HUMAN PACK LEADER**

Many Akitas challenge their owner for the role of pack leader and if this behavior is not corrected immediately, the challenge will grow in intensity. Usually occurring before the dog is a year old -- in the form of disobeying a command or growling or snapping -- this serious offense should be corrected in accordance. Let the dog win the first challenge and you will not wish to live with him. Expect to deal with it and go on from there. A firm correction at the first display of challenge for leadership and your Akita will rarely repeat the act.

### **AKITAS AND CHILDREN, AND CATS**

As a breed Akitas differ as individual dogs are, they are all very intelligent and devoted to their families. They have a wonderful sense of humor and fun that makes them a joy to live with. They like long walks on a leash and snow (they are often used for pulling sleds).

Some Akitas raised with children can be wonderful companions and loyal defenders; Akitas not raised with children should be watched carefully when around children. Because of some tragic incidents, Akita Rescue prefers not to place Akitas in homes with children under the age of 12 years. The fast movements of small children will put an Akita on guard, which can result in injury to the child.

Akitas are very feline -- they clean their faces after eating and when hunting, they stalk low to the ground in a feline position. Often used in Japan to hunt bear and wild boar, they hunt small animals and that can include the family cat! Raising an Akita puppy with an adult cat is still no guarantee of safety. A six-year-old Akita, who had been raised with two adult cats, killed one in an unprovoked attack, though she had never shown aggression previously. Yet, I've seen Akitas live to ripe old ages with the family cat as a friend and companion. Each Akita is different, unpredictable.

## **BEWARE -- THE PET PROFITEERS HAVE JUMPED ON THE TRENDY BANDWAGON!**

For such a relatively new breed in this country, the Akita is already-facing some of the breeding problems afflicting other popular breeds. Because Akitas command a high price \$250.00-\$1,000.00 there are people who consider the breed for its monetary worth only and when buying puppy, BEWARE! There are some very serious genetic problems in the breed and you could buy a genetic time bomb.

Hip dysplasia is one problem, but some years ago responsible breeders began having breeding stock OFA'd (x-rayed) and the incidence of dysplasia was reduced from 51 % to 17%.

Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA), which results in blindness, is found in this breed and buying a puppy from parents certified free from PRA does not guarantee that your puppy will never have PRA. The certification must be done every six months and since this disease can occur at any age, though parents may be free from PRA when the puppies are born, they can still develop the disease later on. This means that parents could have passed on the genetic tendency. Certification is not a test for genetic carriers, but an eye examination to determine the presence of the disease.

Glaucoma, epilepsy and autoimmune diseases are also found in the Akita. Stay away from pet stores and backyard, unknowledgeable breeders. The pain of watching your dog suffer from autoimmune diseases or blindness is simply not worth it. Any breeder who will sell to a pet store is more interested in money than in producing healthy, sound animals. Ignorant breeders who own a male and a female which they've bred together (or a female who was bred to a male down-the-street) do not care enough or know enough to research the genetic backgrounds of both lines to determine if the breeding will be a good one. They see puppies with dollar signs on their bodies and you would be ill advised to own one of their puppies.

This noble breed, once companion to shoguns, is dignified, intelligent, loyal, devoted, courageous and aloof. They are large, with breathtaking beauty, but they are also very strong and seek to dominate. Because of these two latter traits, they require a great deal of work: socialization and training. If the extra work and challenge appeal to you, then you should be owned by an Akita.

Barbara Bouyet lives in Thousand Oaks, California. Because of her work with Rescue, this profile takes on special significance.

If you know of anyone who is considering the purchase of an Akita, please show him or her this profile before they buy! Their Akita will be eternally grateful for a happy and truly permanent home.

## **BREED PROFILE: THE AKITA**

by Edita Van der Lyn (Dog Fancy Magazine, November 1984)

"Tender in heart and strength" is how the Japanese describe their Ichiban (number one) the AKITA. Of the seven purebred Japanese breeds, the Akita is the largest and the most revered by the people of Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Education has designated it as a national monument, and in their native land they regarded not only as fine pets and companions but also as symbols of good health.

The breed was developed in the 17th century when a nobleman exiled to Akita Prefecture, the northernmost province of the island of Honshu, Japan, encouraged the land barons there to compete in the breeding of a dog for hunting. He wanted a large, aggressive dog that would be versatile enough to hunt deer and bear. Generations of selective breeding produced the Akita's ancestor (smaller than the modern day Akita), a dog of superior size and frame with versatile hunting abilities.

Once, ownership of an Akita was restricted to the Imperial family and the ruling aristocracy. Instructions for the dog's care and feeding were detailed in elaborate ceremony and special leashes denoted the Akita's rank and the standing of its owner. Each dog had a caretaker who wore an ornate costume in accordance with the Akita's standing.

Several times over the next, 300 years, this "good luck charm" of the wealthy was nearly driven to extinction. Periodic favor kept the Akita alive through the Meiji and Taisho eras. But, during the 17th and 18th centuries, dog fighting posed a serious threat to the breed's continuation. Crossed with the Tosa Fighting Dog (a large mastiff type of dog) from Shikoku Island produced the "Shin-Akita" (New Akita Dog), an animal of imposing size, trigger-like aggression and immense power. With all the inter-breeding to produce Shin-Akitas, the original strain was nearly lost.

In 1899, there was a devastating outbreak of rabies in Japan. During the next 30 years, nearly 3,000 cases were reported. Dogs including many Akitas, were ruthlessly and indiscriminately killed, for fear they might be carriers of this fatal disease:

By the 1900's, Akitas were nearly extinct. In 1927, the Akita Inu Hozankai Society of Japan was established to preserve the purity of the breed. In 1931, the government of Japan designated the Akita breed as a national monument as one of Japan's national treasures. The breed was so highly prized because of its rarity that the government would subsidize food for Akitas when their owners couldn't afford to feed them.

The ancient Japanese word *matagi*, meaning esteemed hunter, was bestowed on the best hunters in a village. The Akita was known as *matagi-inu* (esteemed hunting dog) by the hunters of the northern Prefecture of Akita, who used pairs of dogs (a male and a female) to hunt deer, bear and wild boar. The animals would hold their prey at bay until the hunters arrived.

Akitas are highly prized because they hunt silently. They also have a "soft mouth" which allows them to retrieve game unharmed. Legend has it that Akitas were even said to have been used to drive fish into waiting nets. The renowned Helen Keller is accredited with bringing the first Akita to the U.S.

Outside of a Tokyo train station there is a statue of Hachiko, faithful pet of Dr. Elisaburo Ueno. The dog waited faithfully each day for his master to debark the train after work. One day the master did not come home, but still Hachiko waited, keeping up his daily vigil for nine years. Station attendants fed him until his death, and each year a solemn ceremony is held in his honor. Keller was so taken with the story of the dog's fidelity that the Ministry of Education presented her with an Akita puppy named Kamikaze. Later, when the puppy died, the Ministry sent a second Akita to Miss Keller.

The breed's popularity in the U.S. really started when returning servicemen brought the dogs home with them. They were attracted to the dogs' strength and adaptability. The Akita

Club was founded in 1956, and the breed was admitted to registration in the American Kennel Club Stud Book in October 1972, and to regular show classification in 1973.

It is not uncommon for the uninitiated to ask if the Akita is a cross between a dog and a bear. Indeed its massive head and chest do "bear" a certain resemblance to the larger mammals. One distinctive feature of the Akita is its fine ears: erect, triangular, small ears, set slanting forward and on either side of the head. Another Akita feature you can't miss is its tail, set high and carried in over its back. Its eyes are deep-set and triangular.

The Akita is a liberal combination of kindness, courage and alertness. It is extraordinarily affectionate and tolerant with its owner. It is also very protective and will defend itself and its charges against others, particularly other dogs. It is intelligent and retains its lessons very well. But it can't be bullied into submissiveness and will resent forceful training methods and nagging.

Akitas will not tolerate physical abuse. They are strong willed dogs with proud egos. They need firm handling, patience and praise. Large breeds like the Akita have a potential for violence and should not be sold to weak-willed or impatient owners. These dogs won't stand for mistreatment and will resent disciplinary training tactics sometimes used on other large breeds. An Akita may live 10 to 12 years and needs love and gentle guidance to prosper. Because of their strength, Akitas in the wrong environment, or without proper training, can be dangerous.

Akita puppies resemble teddy bears as much as older dogs resemble the full-sized, real ones. The Akita litter is usually about 8 to 10 pups. Pet quality pups cost about \$350 to \$600, while show quality ones will cost \$1,000 or more. *[In 2010, pet quality pups cost between \$1,000 and \$1,600, while show quality cost \$2,000+].*

At 3 months, an Akita pup might weigh more than 30 pounds, and at 10 months, it is filled out to nearly adult stature. Akitas will adjust to any climate and don't require as much exercise as other large breeds; however, a large, fenced yard should be considered a necessity.

Akitas mature at 3 to 4 years of age and should be given calcium supplements while growing, **if a need is indicated.**

Akitas are basically sound with few health problems. Conscientious breeders have their stock x-rayed for hip dysplasia. Bloat is a life threatening condition to watch for that requires immediate veterinary attention. Making sure meals are digested before vigorous exercise and that water is not drunk in excess can prevent it. Otherwise, regular grooming, veterinary checkups-and a good diet will keep the Akita in good condition.

An Akita is an intrepid guardian of its family and property. It will not bark unless thoroughly alarmed so it can be kept in close proximity to neighbors. Most are ideal car passengers that won't fuss, drool, or get sick, and they keep themselves fastidiously clean. Akitas generally shed twice a year (sometimes more depending on the weather), unless kept in a cold climate in which case they shed only once.

They are known for their moderate disposition and their ability to generally keep their "cool" in stressful situations. One bad habit they seem to have is "goosing" people, and being goosed from either front or behind by one of these dogs can be embarrassing. The Akita is also inclined to be jealous, so showing affection to other family pets will have to be handled diplomatically.

Akitas are gentle, extremely loyal, dogs. They won the heart of their native land with their kind disposition and loving nature, and for a few special owners, they are the only breed to own. In Japan, they are considered good luck and are often given to ill persons or families with newborns to bring good fortune and happiness into their homes. But no matter what country and customs it must adhere to, the Akita is a versatile and revered companion, capable of loving and protecting its family for many years.

## CARING FOR A DOG TEACHES KIDS RESPONSIBILITY

By Pat Miller

Dogs and kids go together like peanut butter and jelly. We had dogs the entire time I was growing up, starting with Flag the beagle, then Rusty, Cinders and several other spaniel mixes, and finally a succession of rough collies, thanks to my love affair with Lassie. We weren't the most responsible dog owners ---our dogs often roamed the neighborhood, and our females regularly had litters of mixed breed puppies. It wasn't until I was an adult that I actually had a dog die of natural causes rather than catastrophe, but we loved and cared for them the best we knew how at the time.

I couldn't imagine growing up without a dog. Many families today feel the same way. A big percentage of adopters from animal shelters nationwide are families with children. Dog trainers often host entire families, kids included, in their training classes. Some offer training specifically for children and we're frequently asked which breed is the best choice to have around children. (See "**Forget about breed and focus on a dog who adores children**" later in this article)

### Lofty goal

Parents often bring a dog into the home to teach children responsibility. This admirable motive also serves to teach empathy because children easily relate to their pets' feelings. I'm sure that was part of my parents' plan; they assigned the four of us kids the tasks of feeding, walking, and cleaning up after our furry siblings. It worked for me. I decided by first grade that my life's work would involve animals.

The goal of responsibility serves children well, with several caveats. Parents must be good role models for empathy and responsibility. If they threaten to "get rid of" Buddy every time Susie neglects her pet care duties, the message is that the dog is disposable, and the family hasn't made a lifetime commitment to this living, breathing, feeling family member. Susie can shed her responsibility by saying in a pique of childish anger, "Fine, get rid of him!" even if she doesn't mean it.

If the parents follow through on that threat, Susie may suffer considerable guilt and grief, believing it's her fault that Buddy's gone. Or she may grow up with a damaged ability to fulfill responsibilities and commit to relationships, canine or otherwise. The results of that ruined human-animal bond can be in the kennels of shelters across the country.

Parents must make it clear that Buddy's care can't be compromised. They must step in to help, when necessary, to ensure he's fed, exercised and groomed, and deliver appropriate consequences if the child neglects assigned duties--- perhaps a loss of privileges but not the loss of buddy. The lifelong commitment to and responsibility for the family dog ultimately rests on the shoulders of the adults in the house, not the kids.

By the same token, Mom and Dad must model humane and respectful treatment of Buddy if they want Susie to learn empathy. Positive training methods are ideal for teaching empathy, utilizing pain-free tools and techniques, and emphasizing the importance of understanding how dogs think, feel and learn. In contrast, old-fashioned methods that rely on coercion and pain administering tools such prong collars and shock devices, teach Susie that it's OK to hurt living things, and desensitize her to Buddy's reactions when he protests the pain.

### Training Class

Good Trainers welcome appropriate-aged children in their training programs. Children 8 years and up are usually mature enough to participate in training classes, and younger children can help with Buddy's training at home. Even a 2-year-old can learn to lift a hand to his chest as a cue for Buddy to sit politely rather than jump up. An 8-year-old can also assume primary

responsibility for Buddy's care—with supervision—while younger children can help parents and older siblings with dog care tasks.

Depending on the size, training, temperament and behavior of the dog, older children may be able to take Buddy for walks. You can use two leashes to allow younger children to help walk Buddy—you hold one leash, your child holds the other, while you make sure your leash is always shorter so you can absorb the impact if Buddy pulls.

One of the most important things you can do for your dog and children is to provide adequate supervision. Children under the age of 7 or 8 should always be supervised when interacting with Buddy, and sometimes older children, too, depending on the dog and child. An overwhelming percentage of dog-related maulings and fatalities occur with no adults present. It's critically important to remember that any dog can bite. Period.

A child's experiences with dogs can have a significant impact on his perspective on other living beings as he matures. It's up to you as a parent to ensure those experiences are positive, so the child grows up loving, not fearing dogs, and learns how to be responsible for and caring toward the lives that in touches in this world. If all children learned empathy toward all living things as they grew up, what a wonderful world this could be.

### **Forget about focusing on breed and adopt a dog who adores children, not merely tolerates them.**

I'm often asked what breed of dog I recommend for kids. My answer: none. I could recommend a Labrador retriever, a breed known for friendliness, and the family could adopt a lab who would maul their child at the first opportunity. Far more important is the nature of the individual dog and the preferences and personalities of the family members.

I tell people the dog they adopt should adore children, not merely tolerate them. A dog who adores small humans will forgive the inevitable kid stuff the child does and come back for more. A dog who thinks kids walk on water won't think twice about the occasional poke in the side. He'll simply wag his tail when the toddler trips and falls on top of him. The dog who simply tolerates children may be at the end of his fuse after one too many pokes and bite the next toddler who stumbles. The headline will read "Dog Mauls Toddler," and almost every time the article will include two quotes:

1. "We don't know how this happened—he was always good with kids!" Well, he wasn't good with kids. If the owners had been better at reading and understanding canine body language, they would have seen the subtler signs of stress—such as the dog's walking away—that signaled his discomfort and predicted the eventual bite.
2. "The bite was unprovoked." From the dog's perspective, the bite is always provoked. Otherwise, he wouldn't have bitten! What we usually mean when we say "unprovoked" is that the bite seemed inappropriate from our perspective and we don't understand why the dog bit.

It's important to take certain qualities into consideration in addition to the "adores children" trait when adopting a dog. Toy breeds tend to be fragile and are generally not recommended for small children because they break easily. They can also become defensive and nippy when they feel threatened, which occurs easily because of their size.

At the other end of the scale, the giant breeds and those known to have strong personalities with the potential to do significant damage are often not recommended. The more the size disparity between the child and the dog, the more important it becomes that you scrupulously supervise their interactions—the potential for damage is greater.

It is also wise to consider an older dog, rather than a puppy, if you have small children crawling around. A young pup's teeth are needle-sharp, and puppies explore everything, even

tender baby skin, with their teeth. By the age of 6 months, a dog's adult teeth have arrived, and he's far less likely to chew on everything. Shelter and rescue groups are full of young adult dogs given up by their owners when the novelty wore off and the responsibility became too much of a burden. Consider giving one of those dogs a second chance at a lifelong, loving home.

**Ban these behaviors or risk a bite: hugging, staring, teasing, chasing.**

You see inappropriate kid-dog interactions all the time—on television, in advertising, in real life. Dogs in general are pretty tolerant—they put up with a lot of kid behavior I wouldn't allow without snapping. Still, your kids will be safest if you teach them to behave appropriately around dogs. Here are six behaviors to teach our kids not to do:

1. **Hugging and kissing.** As much as this is a loving gesture on the children's part, many dogs don't perceive it as such. These behaviors are often the cause of dog bites—and the kids' faces are usually very near the dog's mouth. Teach your kids to kiss their own hand and then pet Buddy with the "kiss". Avoid hugging and kissing your dog yourself, at least in your child's presence, as this will model inappropriate behavior. Your dog may tolerate your hugs but not your children's—they may have less control over the amount of pressure they exert, and they won't read or understand your dog's signals to stop. If you foolishly choose to ignore this advice, your children must absolutely understand it's never okay to hug and kiss other dogs.
2. **Staring into a dog's eyes.** This is normal human behavior, especially for a child or adult who is somewhat fearful of a dog. Direct eye contact can also be a strong threat to a dog. Teach your child to look at the top of—or over—a dog's head rather than directly at his eyes.
3. **Running and Screaming.** Whether in fear or in play, running and screaming elicit arousal behavior in dogs, and encourage them to chase and bite. If kids want to run and scream, put the dogs away.
4. **Teasing, pinching, poking or blowing at the dog.** Kids like to see dogs react. They need to understand these behaviors are forbidden because they annoy and hurt. Instead teach them to play fetch with Buddy so the dog directs his reactions toward a ball.
5. **Following and chasing.** When a dog walks – and runs—away from a child, he's saying he doesn't want to interact with him. If the child follows, he's pestering a dog and risks getting bitten. Teach your child to respect a dog's choice to leave. If you have very young children, it's a good idea to create escape routes for your dog, such as low gates he can jump over while the children can't.
6. **Wrestling, straddling, riding or lying on the dog.** Just because some dogs seem to tolerate these behaviors doesn't mean they should have to. It's sometimes a fine line between tolerate and bite. Wrestling encourages the dog to be inappropriately physical humans, while straddling, riding and lying on him can cause pain and trigger a bite.

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## FAILED PLACEMENTS

by Sheila Proudman

For some reason(s), a person who once decided to own an Akita' can no longer keep the dog. And so, an ad goes in the local paper, or the dog is given away to an acquaintance, or is taken to the shelter or pound, or is left at the local kennel, or is shoved out of a car on an unfamiliar highway, or is left in (or tied near) the house the owners have moved away from or to paraphrase Paul Simon, "there must be 50 ways to get rid of your Akita". As a breeder, I have been fortunate in that most of my failed placements have been returned to me; in fact, four of the eight pups in my first litter came back by the age of 6 months! However, there are also a few "lost souls" out there - I don't know if they are dead or alive, who owns them, how they are cared for, nothing! Their original owners decided to give them away rather than return them to me. What goes wrong in a failed placement? What makes people give up their Akitas?

In 1984 our local Akita Rescue Society investigated the circumstances of 33 homeless Akitas. Of course, four were strays that had wound up in local shelters and were subsequently returned to their owners. All the rest, 29 Akitas, were placed in new homes or euthanized. Ten of these were in "foster care" with rescue society members, and so we got to know them pretty well. In every case, the dogs were well behaved, even-tempered, accepting of friendship, all-around good pets. You might think that the main reason people give up their Akitas is viciousness or uncontrollable behavior -- these dogs certainly exploded that theory! So, what went wrong?

Admittedly, many people who are giving up a dog will not tell the real reason, even if they know it. As far as we can tell, though, the main reason for giving up their Akitas has to do with lifestyle: the people are moving to a smaller place, or one that doesn't allow dogs, or they are working more hours and don't have enough time to spend taking care of a big dog or the family is breaking up and neither adult wants the responsibility of a dog. Generally, the dogs these people have are under three years old. At least five of the ten Akitas placed by the local rescue society in 1984 were in this category.

So far in 1985, the local group has taken in nine Akitas: five due to lifestyle problems of the owners, two because of neighborhood protests (for killing cats or attacking small dogs), and two were found straying. In only one case was there a problem with the dog itself, a 14-month old male who had been kept crated on the deck of a condo for most of his short life. His personality had never developed properly, and he suddenly attacked a member of the family of the rescue worker with whom he was living, a person who had regularly fed, walked and played with him. With much regret, the rescue group members decided this dog was unplaceable, and had him euthanized; a rescue group can have its own failed placement.

The point is, in only three out of 19 rescue cases was there an actual behavior problem with the dog, and in only one instance was it found to be "incurable". What is going wrong is not with the dogs themselves! IT IS WITH PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY WANT AN AKITA, AND THEN DECIDE A COUPLE OF YEARS LATER THAT THE DOG JUST ISN'T FOR THEM. In the case of my own failed placements, in each instance there was nothing I could discern wrong with the pups; they just didn't meet their new owner's expectations. I have learned to point out every disadvantage I can think of (they chew, they shed, they have to be kept in a run or in the house in a DOG PROOF place, they can be stubborn if not trained young, they will attack other dogs, they cost money to keep properly, and soon) and give the people at least a 24 hour cooling-off period to think all these things over.

It seems that there are two ways in which we can decrease the number of failed placements. One is telling people just how much time, work and money is involved, and that the pups soon outgrow the cuddly Teddy-Bear stage and become big, independent dogs who spend much of their time eating, eliminating, shedding and getting bored. It is important that potential

Akita owners understand that **THEY ARE MAKING A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT**, and that the house will never be the same once the dog lives there. I find that the most successful placements I have are ones where a big dog has lived before, the people are used to what that means, and they have decided to accept whatever inconveniences there may be in return for the pleasures derived from having an Akita.

In addition, we need to assess the stability and judgment of the potential owner: not just finding out if there is a fenced yard, but getting an idea of how realistic it is for this person to have an Akita. It may be impossible, of course, to detect the seemingly happy couple that will file for divorce next year, or the executive who will suddenly be transferred to Hawaii. But it should be possible to determine how that person will **REACT** to these situations -- will he or she return the pup, place it with a friend, or dump it on the interstate median strip? Unfortunately there is no easy way to find out about a potential owner, except perhaps through checking on what happened to other animals he or she has owned. It may help to ask for a reference from their veterinarian. What we can do as breeders, then, to make our placements as successful as possible, is to try to match the expectations of the potential owner with what can realistically be "delivered" by the dog, to match what the potential owners are willing to give in terms of time and work expense with the needs of the dog, and to discuss in advance what the owner will do if it doesn't work out. If you are unwilling to take back your failed placements, at least suggest the person try a responsible local organization such as a Akita Rescue or a humane society; and if you do that, it would be nice if you would send the group a few dollars to help them take care of **YOUR** dogs.

## AKITA FACTS

By Jodi Marcus

1. Most Akita puppies chew. A poodle puts a few teeth marks in chair; an Akita will destroy the whole chair. Most grow out of this stage by their first birthday, but some do not stop until they are about two. They have been named "100 pound termites" with good reason.
2. Akitas do not bark unless there is a good reason. When an Akita is barking, pay attention!
3. Akitas are inherently aggressive towards other animals and for this reason, they should not be allowed to run free or roam at will.
4. Akitas consider small animals as prey and hunt them. This includes cats, rodents, birds, small wildlife and small dogs. Akitas can be raised to accept animals in residence. Some adult Akitas can even be trained to fit into a home where other animals are already established. It is imperative, however, that the Akita be closely watched around the other animals until you have established a peaceful co-existence, and remember nothing is ever guaranteed.
5. Akitas are VERY FOOD POSSESSIVE around other animals, and sometimes people. If you have other pets, you will want to be certain the Akita is given his own food bowl or treats well away from other animals and that the other animal not allowed near the Akita until you are sure every last vestige of the food is gone. They can also be toy possessive. Two dogs wanting the same toy or bone is a sure setting for a fight.
6. Akitas not raised with children are not always tolerant of small children, and **the Akita should never be left alone with a child under any circumstances**. Often, Akitas raised with children will tolerate their own children, but may not accept the neighborhood kids who come to play. Children **MUST** be taught acceptable behavior around dogs, and vice versa.
7. Akitas do not like to be teased and may respond by biting. Some children are allowed to treat animals unkindly, a behavior that often leads to cruelty to animals. These children should be kept away from an Akita whose large size and hunting instincts can endanger the child's life.
8. Akitas like to take charge and may at times challenge you for the dominant position (especially adolescent males from 1 year to 2 years of age). This behavior cannot be tolerated and a firm, CONSISTENT correction should be your immediate response. Akitas with good temperament accept discipline well-- not physical or verbal abuse, but intelligent discipline.
9. Akitas should be obedience trained BY THEIR OWNER and not sent away to school. A good obedience class will guarantee a firm bond with your dog and well-behaved dog. Remember though, Akitas are extremely intelligent and tend to get bored easily. They learn quickly so short training periods interspersed with fun are suggested. This keeps the dog from becoming bored. Akitas are very stubborn, and when the dog thinks it is a waste of time to "sit" or "stay" one more time, he may simply walk away, or remain seated. Obedience training requires patience!
10. Some Akitas are "talkers". They may grunt, groan and mumble to entertain themselves and you. This conversational verbalizing is not growling and should not be interpreted as a growl, which sounds quite different. Akita "talking" is an endearing trait, and should not frighten you. After living with the dog, you will easily distinguish between talking and growling.
11. Akitas are not considered hyperactive; they are low activity indoor dogs and moderate activity outdoor dogs. They can fit into a sedentary household, but for optimum health for both you and your Akita, regular exercise is important.

12. Akitas are very people oriented and are not happy when kept apart from the family. If you do not plan on having your dog live with you both inside your home and yard, you should not seriously consider an Akita for a pet.
13. When keeping another dog with an Akita, it is usually more harmonious to have one of each sex. As a rule, males will fight with other males and females with other females. There can be fights between opposite sexes if food or toys are involved.
14. If your Akita has a propensity for digging, expect your yard to resemble a lunar landscape; they are great earth moving machines when so motivated.
15. Some Akitas are escape artists. They will hook their front paws over the top of a low fence and climb over. Some have even climbed tall chain link fencing. If they can get their heads under a fence, the rest of the body is sure to follow. Some have been known to go through a wooden fence with the right motivation.
16. Akitas usually shed twice a year in great quantities. It is called "blowing their coat". They lose the entire woolly undercoat, which makes little tumbleweeds of hair all over your house. The shed lasts 4 to 8 weeks. Daily brushing and warm baths can hurry it along.
17. GROOMING: If you get a puppy, start cutting toenails, brushing, bathing, ear cleaning, tooth brushing very early. It is much easier to do this to a 20 lb. puppy and get him used to it than to fight with a 100 lb. adult. Adults can be trained to accept this with patience, food, and a little TLC.
18. Akitas are big dogs. Therefore, everything is going to be "more". More expensive vet bills, medications, collars, food, bigger piles of stool to clean up, large food/water bowls, large size crates. It will be expensive to board your Akita, or have it bathed and dipped. This will affect you financially, so consider carefully, and be sure you can afford to have an Akita.
19. Akitas live from 10-14 years with good care and proper nutrition.
20. . Feed your Akita a high quality non-soy food. Akitas fed bargain brand foods will not look as good or be as healthy as those fed premium foods. Remember "garbage in, garbage out".
21. Akitas are loyal, excellent watchdogs, wonderful companions who enjoy affection, but do not crave it. Once you've been owned by an Akita, you will never switch to another breed!

## WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE? A Lesson in Becoming Alpha

(By Vicki Rodenberg, Chairman of the Chow Chow Clup Inc. Welfare Committee)

My dog just tried to bite me! All I did was tell him to move over so I could sit on the couch next to him." "My dog got into the trash can and when I scolded her, she growled at me. What's wrong with her? I thought she loved me!" "Our dog is very affectionate most of the time but when we try to make him do something he doesn't want to do, he snaps at us."

What do these three dogs have in common? Are they nasty or downright vicious? No - they're "alpha". They've taken over the leadership of the families that love them. Instead of taking orders from their people, these dogs are giving orders! Your dog can love you very much and still try to dominate you or other members of your family.

Dogs are social creatures and believers in social order. A dog's social system is a "pack" with a well-defined pecking order. The leader of the pack is the alpha, supreme boss, Top Dog. He (or she) gets the best of everything - the best food, the best place to sleep, the best toy, etc. The leader also gets to be first in everything - he gets to eat first, to leave first and to get attention first. All the other dogs in the pack respect the alpha dog's wishes. Any dog that challenges the alpha's authority gets a swift physical reminder of just where his place in the pack really is.

Your family is your dog's "pack: Many dogs fit easily into the lower levels of their human pack's pecking order and don't make waves. They do what they're told and don't challenge authority. Other dogs don't fit in quite as well. Some of them are natural born leaders and are always challenging their human alphas. Other dogs are social climbers - they're always looking for ways to get a little closer to the top of the family ladder. These natural leaders and the social climbers can become problems to an unsuspecting family that's not aware of the dog's natural pack instincts.

Some families encourage their dogs to take over the "pack" without realizing it. They treat their dogs as equals, not as subordinates. They give them special privileges like being allowed to sleep on the bed or couch. They don't train their dogs and let them get away with disobeying commands. In a real dog pack, no one but the alpha dog would get this kind of treatment. Alpha doesn't have anything to do with size. The tiniest Chihuahua can be a canine Hitler. In fact, the smaller the dog, the more people tend to baby them and cater to them - making the dog feel even more dominant and in control of his humans.

Alpha dogs often seem to make good pets. They're confident, smarter than average, and affectionate. They can be wonderful with children and good with strangers. Everything seems to be great with the relationship - until someone crosses him or makes him do something he doesn't want to do. Then, suddenly, this wonderful dog growls or tries to bite someone and no one understands why.

In a real dog pack, the alpha dog doesn't have to answer to anyone. No one gives him orders or tells him what to do. The other dogs in the pack respect his position. If another dog is foolish enough to challenge the alpha by trying to take his bone or his favorite sleeping place, the alpha dog will quickly put him in his place with a hard stare or a growl. If this doesn't work, the alpha dog will enforce his leadership with his teeth. This is all natural, instinctive behavior - in a dog's world. In a human family, though, this behavior is unacceptable and dangerous.

Dogs need and want leaders. They have an instinctive need to fit into a pack. They want the security of knowing their place and what's expected of them. Most of them don't want to be alpha - they want someone else to give the orders and make the decisions. If his humans don't provide that leadership, the dog will take over the role himself. If you've allowed your dog to become alpha, you're at his mercy and as a leader, he may be either a benevolent king or a tyrant!

If you think your dog is alpha in your household, he probably is. "If your dog respects only one or two members of the family but dominates the others, you still have a problem. The

dog's place should be at the -bottom- of your human family's pack order, not at the top or somewhere in between.

In order to reclaim your family's rightful place as leaders of the pack, your dog needs some lessons in how to be a subordinate, not an equal. You're going to show him what it means to be a dog again. Your dog's mother showed him very early in life that -she- was alpha and that he had to respect her. As a puppy, he was given a secure place in his litter's pack and because of that security, he was free to concentrate on growing, learning, playing, loving and just being a dog. Your dog doesn't really want the responsibility of being alpha, having to make the decisions and defend his position at the top. He wants a leader to follow and worship so he can have the freedom of just being a dog again.

### **How To Become Leader of Your Pack**

Your dog watches you constantly and reads your body language. He knows if you're insecure, uncomfortable in a leadership role or won't enforce a command. This behavior confuses him, makes him insecure and if he's a natural leader or has a social-climbing personality, it'll encourage him to assume the alpha position and tell you what to do.

"Alpha" is an attitude. It involves quiet confidence, dignity, intelligence, an air of authority. A dog can sense this attitude almost immediately - it's how his mother acted towards him. Watch a professional trainer or a good obedience instructor. They stand tall and use their voices and eyes to project the idea that they are capable of getting what they want. They're gentle but firm, loving but tough, all at the same time. Most dogs are immediately submissive towards this type of personality because they recognize and respect alpha when they see it.

Practice being alpha. Stand up straight with your shoulders back. Walk tall. Practice using a new tone of voice, one that's deep and firm. Don't ask your dog to do something - tell him. There's a difference. He knows the difference, too! Remember that as alpha, you're entitled to make the rules and give the orders. Your dog understands that instinctively.

With most dogs, just this change in your attitude and an obedience-training course will be enough to turn things around. With a dog that's already taken over the household and has enforced his position by growling or biting and has been allowed to get away with it, you'll need to do more than just decide to be alpha. The dog is going to need an attitude adjustment as well.

Natural leaders and social climbers aren't going to want to give up their alpha position. Your sudden change in behavior is going to shock and threaten them. Your dog might act even more aggressively than before. An alpha dog will instinctively respond to "challenges to" his authority. It's his nature to want to put down revolutionary uprisings by the peasants! Don't worry, there's a way around it.

An alpha dog already knows that he can beat you in a physical fight so returning his aggression with violence of your own won't work. Until you've successfully established your position as alpha, corrections like hitting, shaking, or using the "rollover" techniques described in some books will not work and can be downright dangerous to you. An alpha dog will respond to these methods with violence and you could be seriously hurt.

What you need to do is use your brain! You're smarter than he is and you can out think him. You'll also need to be more stubborn than he is. What I'm about to describe here is an effective, nonviolent method of removing your dog from alpha status and putting him back at the bottom of the family totem pole where he belongs and where he needs to be. In order for this method to work, your whole family has to be involved. It requires an attitude adjustment from everyone and a new way of working with your dog.

This is serious business. A dog that bites or threatens people is a dangerous dog, no matter how much you love him. If treating your dog like a dog and not an equal seems harsh to you, keep in mind that our society no longer tolerates dangerous dogs. Lawsuits from dog bites are now settling for millions of dollars - you could lose your home and everything else you own if

your dog injures someone. You or your children could be permanently disfigured. And your dog could lose his life. That's the bottom line. .

### **Canine Boot Camp For Alpha Adjustment**

From this day forward, you're going to teach your dog that he is a dog, not a miniature human being in a furry suit. His mother taught him how to be a dog once and how to take orders. Along the way, through lack of training or misunderstood intentions, he's forgotten. With your help, he's going to remember what he is and how he fits into the world. Before long, he's even going to like it!

Dogs were bred to look to humans for food, companionship and guidance. An alpha dog doesn't ask for what he wants, he demands it. He lets you know in no uncertain terms that he wants his dinner, that he wants to go out, that he wants to play and be petted and that he wants these things right now. You're going to teach him that from now on, he has to earn what he gets. No more free rides. This is going to be a shock to his system at first but you'll be surprised how quickly he'll catch on and that he'll actually become eager to please you.

If your dog doesn't already know the simple command SIT, teach it to him. Reward him with praise and a tidbit. Don't go overboard with the praise. A simple "Good boy!" in a happy voice is enough. Now, every time your dog wants something - his dinner, a trip outside, a walk, some...attention, anything, tell him (remember, don't ask him -tell- him), to SIT first. When he does, praise him with a "Good Boy", then tell him Okay and give him whatever it is he wants as a reward. If he refuses to SIT, walk away and ignore him. No SIT, no reward. If you don't think he understands the command, work on his training some more. If he just doesn't want to obey, ignore him - DON'T give him what he wants or reward him in any fashion.

Make him sit before giving him his dinner, make him sit at the door before going outside, make him sit in front of you to be petted, make him sit before giving him his toy. If you normally leave food out for him all of the time, stop. Go to a twice daily feeding and -you- decide what time of day he'll be fed. Make him sit for his dinner. If he won't obey the command - he gets no dinner. Walk away and ignore him. Bring the food out later and tell him again to SIT. If he understands the command, don't tell him more than once. He heard you the first time. Give commands from a standing position and use a deep, firm tone of voice.

If the dog respects certain members of the family but not others, let the others be the ones to feed him and bring the good things to his life for now. Show them how to make him obey the SIT command and how to walk away and ignore him if he won't do as he's told. It's important that your whole family follows this program. Dogs are like kids - if they can't have their way with Mom, they'll go ask Dad. In your dog's case, if he finds a member of the family that he can dominate, he'll continue to do so. You want your dog to learn that he has to respect and obey everyone. Remember - his place is at the bottom of the totem pole. Bouncing him from the top spot helps but if he thinks he's anywhere in the middle, you're still going to have problems. .

Think - you know your dog and know what he's likely to do under most circumstances. Stay a step ahead of him and anticipate his behavior so you can avoid or correct it. If he gets into the trash and growls -when scolded, make the trash can inaccessible. If he likes to bolt out the door ahead of you, put a leash on him. Make him sit and wait while you open the door and give him permission - OKAY! - to go out. If your alpha dog doesn't like to come when he's called (and he probably doesn't!), don't let him outside off leash. Without a leash, you have no control over him and he knows it.

**Petting and attention:** Alpha dogs are used to being fussed over. In a real dog pack, subordinate dogs are forever touching, licking and grooming the alpha dog. It's a show of respect and submission. For now until his attitude has shown improvement, cut down on the amount of cuddling your dog gets. When he wants attention, make him SIT first, give him a few kind words and pats, and then stop. Go back to whatever it was you were doing and ignore him.

If he pesters you, tell him NO! in a firm voice and ignore him some more. Pet him when -you- want to, not just because -he- wants you to. Also, for the time being; don't get down on the floor or on your knees to pet your dog. That, too, is a show of submission. Give praise, petting and rewards from a position that's higher than the dog.

**Games: If you or anyone in your family wrestles, rough houses, or plays tug of war with your dog, STOP!** These games encourage dogs to dominate people physically and to use their teeth. In a dog pack or in a litter, these games are more than just playing - they help to establish pack order based on physical strength. Your dog is already probably stronger and quicker than you are. Rough, physical games prove that to him. He doesn't need to be reminded of it! "

Find new games for him to play. Hide & seek, fetch or frisbee catching are more appropriate. Make sure you're the one who starts and ends the game, not the dog. Stop playing before the dog gets bored and is inclined to keep the ball or frisbee.

**Where does your dog sleep?** Not in your bedroom and especially not on your bed! Your bedroom is a special place - it's your "den: An alpha dog thinks he has a right to sleep in your den because he considers himself your equal. In fact, he may have already taken over your bed, refusing to get off when told or growling and snapping when anyone asks him to make room *for* the humans. Until your dog's alpha problems are fully under control, the bedroom should be off-limits! The same goes for sleeping on furniture. If you can't keep him off the couch without a fight, deny him access to the room until his behavior and training has improved.

**Crate training:** Dog crates have 1,000 uses and working with an alpha dog is one of them. It's a great place for your dog to sleep at night, to eat in and just to stay in when he needs to chill out and be reminded he is a dog. The crate is your dog's "den". Start crate training by feeding him his dinner in his crate. Close the door and let him stay there for an hour afterwards. If he throws a tantrum, ignore him. Don't let your dog out of his crate until he's quiet and settled. At bedtime, show him an irresistible goodie, tell him to SIT and when he does, throw the goodie into the crate. When he dives in for the treat, tell him what a good boy he is and close the door.

**Graduating from Boot Camp: What's next?** Just like in the any boot camp is really just an introduction to a new career and new way of doing things. A tour through boot camp isn't going to solve your alpha dog's problems forever. It's a way to get basic respect from a dog that's been bullying you without having to resort to physical force.

How long should boot camp last? That depends on the dog. Some will show an improvement right away, others may take much longer. For really tough cookies, natural leaders that need constant reminders of their place in the pack, Alpha Dog Boot Camp will become a way of life. Social climbers may need periodic trips through boot camp if you get lax and accidentally let them climb back up a notch or two in the family pack order.

How do you know if you're making a difference? If boot camp has been successful, your dog should start looking to you for directions and permission. He'll show an eagerness to please. Watch how your dog approaches and greets you. Does he come to you "standing tall," with his head and ears held high and erect? It may look impressive and proud but it means he's still alpha and you still have problems! A dog that accepts humans as superiors will approach you with his head slightly lowered and his ears back or off to the sides. He'll "shrink" his whole body a little in a show of submission. Watch how he greets all the members of the family. If he displays this submissive posture to some of them, but not others, those are the ones who still need to work on their own alpha posture and methods. They should take him back through another tour of boot camp with support from the rest of the family.

**Obedience Training:** Once your dog has begun to accept this new way of life and his new position in the family, you should take him through an obedience course with a qualified trainer.

All dogs need to be trained and alpha dogs need training most of all! You don't have to wait until he's through with boot camp to start this training but it's important that he respects at least one member of the family and is willing to take direction from them.

Obedience class teaches -you- to train your dog. It teaches you how to be alpha, how to enforce commands and rules, how to get respect and to keep it. All family members who are old enough to understand and control the dog should participate in the class.

Obedience training is a lifelong process. One obedience course does not a trained dog make! Obedience commands need to be practiced and incorporated into your daily life. In a dog pack, the alpha animal uses occasional reminders to reinforce his authority. Certain commands, like DOWN/STAY, are especially effective, nonviolent reminders of a dog's place in the family pack order and who's really in charge here.

A well-trained obedient dog is a happy dog and a joy to live with. Dogs want to please and need a job to do. Training gives them the opportunity to do both. A well-trained dog has more freedom. He can go more places and do more things with you because he knows how to behave. A well-trained dog that's secure in his place within the family pack is comfortable and confident. He knows what's expected of him. He knows his limits and who his leaders are. He's free from the responsibility of running the household and making decisions. He's free to be your loving companion and not your boss. He's free to be a dog – what he was born to be and what he always wanted to be in the first place!

**When You Need Professional Help:** If your dog has already injured you or someone else or if you are afraid of your dog, you should consult a qualified professional dog trainer or behaviorist before starting Canine Boot Camp. Your dog should also have an exam by your vet to make sure there are no physical causes for his behavior.

To find a qualified trainer or behaviorist near you, contact your veterinarian or the American Kennel Club for a list of obedience training clubs in your area.

*The American Kennel Club 51 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10010 (212) 696-8200*

*American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior. Dr. Gary Landsberg Doncaster Animal Clinic 99 Henderson Ave Thornhill, Ontario, Canada L3T 2K9 (416) 881-2922*

**Related Reading:**

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## AKITA, CD

By Wendy Grudin

This is the saga of an Akita named Shooter and his metamorphosis from obedience class reject to working dog, par excellence. I purchased Shooter as a conformation show prospect at the tender age of seven weeks; I had repeatedly been advised that Akitas were not readily inclined toward obedience, and, if I wanted a CD (companion dog) candidate, I'd be smart to choose another breed.

By the age of six months, it became quite apparent that Shooter was a far cry from a conformation show prospect. Even if one could dismiss minor structural faults, the fact that he was a monorchid could not be ignored. I was mortified; my \$500 show puppy could never be shown. Or could he?

There really wasn't anything too unusual about Shooter's temperament; he was simply a typical male Akita. Taken one step further, he was self-willed, stubborn, extraordinarily aggressive toward other dogs, and lazy -- and those were his good points!

At six months (the prime age for beginning obedience training), I registered Shooter and myself in a beginner's obedience class; here is where our problems began. Our obedience instructor did not seem to profess a fondness for dogs demonstrating Shooter's particular behavior patterns. We ended the course disappointed and dejected. At this point, it occurred to me that there must be more than one way to train a dog and I began to pursue other training methods. During this interim period, I also decided to take a trip from my home in Colorado to visit my parents in California. I would make the journey by pickup truck and, of course, Shooter would be my constant companion. The journey was filled with entertaining happenings, most of them initiated by Shooter. He was always the center of attention wherever we went, and it became increasingly apparent to me that there was great potential for this dog to increase his mental aptitude. I was eager to return home and renew the training process.

Shooter was not eight months old, and saying that he was "full of vinegar" could only be interpreted as an understatement. After making several calls to various trainers, I located a woman who was actually enthusiastic about the prospects of working with a dominant, stubborn, eight-month-old male Akita. I began to share her enthusiasm and anxiously awaited the start of the eight-week beginner's course. This series of classes would be my introduction to the unforgettable emotional highs and the unfortunate lows of obedience training and showing.

Class was held at a school gymnasium. To this day, I still vividly remember the first night of instruction. You see, Shooter had decided that it was fine for the rest of the dogs to trot around the gym and learn to heel, but, as far as he was concerned, he wasn't about to conform to such ludicrous behavior. Assuming a dominant posture, I literally dragged him around the circumference of the gym, twice. By the end of the class, he was not only heeling proficiently, but enjoying it too.

It is important to remember to remain in the dominant role throughout the training process and the future relationship with your dog. Once your dog understands his place as subservient to you, he will not only look to you for direction, but he will also become more secure in his attitude toward life.

Just as a child becomes more confident and mature through his parents' direction and love, so does a dog treated in the same manner.

Our classes progressed smoothly. Creating situations that forced him to become aggressive, and then using correction and praise, accordingly, channeled the aggressiveness. By the end of the eight-week period, I was overjoyed with his progress and looked forward to the start of off-lead work. We began the transfer from on lead, to off-lead with the use of a "light line" (a very lightweight corded nylon fine). The light line encourages the dog to see you in control whether you're using a leather lead, or a light line, or no line at all! The light line also

works wonders in heightening the proficiency of 30 foot recalls by affording the possibility of immediate reinforcement. The procedure was successful, and one month later, Shooter had adjusted quite well to off-lead work and was ready to compete at the local Denver fun matches.

We had worked diligently as a team, incorporating hard half hour sessions with fun and games following each session. The teamwork paid off. He was hardly ever out of the ribbons in novice competition at area fun matches. At last, he was ready for his first AKC obedience trial, and I hardly had time to work Shooter before the show.

There were 56 entries in Novice A and the judging, which began at 8:00 AM, was not completed until mid-afternoon. Finally, it was our turn and the friendly, reassuring judge could have encouraged even the most nervous handler. . Halfway through our exercises, a dog quite close by began to bark, immediately persuading many more dogs to join the sing-in. Shooter's attention remained focused on me, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Moments such as these make me thankful that I train using distractions. Do not repeatedly train in a sterile area (i.e. your backyard). If so, you will pay the price with a dog that falls apart when distractions appear. Set up situations that force the dog to perform even in the most adverse conditions. Here is a partial list of distracting situations:

1. Practice one to three minute sit-stays with many people clapping and whistling. (Have you attended a dog show lately that was quiet?) .
2. Practice on and off lead heeling with bait strewn on the ground.
3. Practice what we call "variegated recalls" -- leave the dogs on sit-stays and from 30 feet away have each handler individually call his dog. The exercise increases the dog's ability to focus on you, not the distractions around him. (I'd recommend the use of the light line for this exercise!)
4. Practice long sit-stays at home in your dog's favorite resting place. That's right, tell your dog to sit where he would normally lie down. This exercise should keep even the laziest Akitas from breaking their sit-stays!

(Back to the show.) At the completion of our exercises, the judge approached me and said "Do you mind if I ask you a question?" "No", I responded, wondering what I could possibly tell him that he didn't already know. "What kind of a dog is that?" he asked. I responded "Akita", and I suddenly became aware of just how few Akitas are shown in obedience. We qualified that day with a comfortable score of 188.5.

A period of time elapsed before I had the opportunity to enter Shooter in Novice competition again. Finally I decided that the time was right and I entered him in two large Denver area shows. He excelled the first day of competition, scoring an exciting 193.5 That night I dreamed he would take fourth place the next day and receive a lovely trophy. Daylight came quickly and we arrived at the show site with just enough time to pass by the trophy table and locate the fourth place trophy. Competition was keen among the entry of 29 dogs. Our number was 16. It was no time at all before the ring steward called for number 16. We started our pattern and I remember quite vividly how my nervousness was eased by Shooter's attentive performance. It was now time for the 30 foot recall. The judge motioned me to call my dog. "Shooter come" my voice rang out, and he trotted in to me and sat, just a bit crooked, in front of me. He looked up with his typical expression that seems to ask. "Did I do it right, Mom?" I gave him the finish command and we were done. Now just "sits" and "downs" to be completed and then the scoring.

All who qualified were called back into the ring to receive their scores. First place went to an enthusiastic Golden Retriever. A superior-working Siberian Husky secured the second place standing. "And third place", said the judge, "goes to dog number 16," My dream had become reality, and had gone one better!

Shooter is now a Companion Dog in every sense of the word. He is a main component of our training center and is used as a demonstration dog for on and off lead classes. He is also

the mainstay for obedience demonstrations that we give to nursing and retirement homes. We are now working toward his COX. and hope to have that title by the winter of 1984.

The following recommendations are for those of you who are beginning to work your Akita in obedience:

1. Choose your training instructor carefully: Make sure he or she offers individual instruction in a classroom environment, utilizing oodles of distractions. If the trainer's attitude seems to indicate that Akitas lack the ability to perform proficiently, I advise you to change trainers.
2. If you remember just one thing about the relationship between you and your Akita, let it be mutual respect. Learn to work as a team and never let yourself see your training sessions as all work and no play. Once your Akita senses that training can't also be fun, he will want to quit your team!
3. Complete your training sessions on a positive note (an exercise your Akita performs particularly well).
4. I'm often asked which training method works best on Akitas, This question is difficult to answer since all dogs are individuals and respond uniquely to varying training techniques. I do believe that a "companion dog" should work out of respect and devotion for you, the handler. I do not condone the use of food in training. Bribing your dog with choice morsels may produce a dog that works fine at home; but what do you do (for example, at an AKC Trial where no bait is allowed) when you dog looks up at you and asks "Where's the beef?"
5. Don't forget to praise. We constantly have to remind novice handlers to praise their dogs. It seems that beginning handlers concentrate all their energies on corrections and neglect the praise. If you succumb to this forgetfulness, you will end up with, at best, a sullen worker.
6. Most importantly, be patient! Akitas are slow to mature, both physically and mentally. Always be certain your dog understands the current exercise before progressing to the next.

*(ARMAC NOTE: Since this article was written, many new training methods have been developed. Training with food, done properly, with the dog weaned from it over time, can be a very effective training tool. "Clicker" training has used with some success with Akitas. It is up to you to check out the different methods and trainers until you find one that both you and your dog like, and can deal with. Sometimes you have to mix and match methods according to what works with your particular dog.)*

## THE OUTSIDE DOG

By Elaine Nussbaum (Reprinted, Akita Graffiti - March 1987)

Dogs are considered "pack" animals. They do not tend to be alone or solitary. Domesticated dogs no longer have packs of other dogs to live with, so now want to be members of human families. Also, dogs are "den" animals. This is the reason dogs can be housebroken. Dogs want their den to be clean and secure, so they regard your house as their den.

Obviously, dogs can be forced to live outside, continually alone and away from their families. But to force this kind of life on a dog is one of the worst things you can do to it. Such a life goes against the dog's two most basic instincts.

If you have any doubts about these ideas, think about all the whining, barking, clawing outside dogs you have seen trying desperately, at first, to get to their human families, and then just giving up to become overactive, listless, fearful, or vicious when no one hears their perfectly reasonable requests.

Unless you can accept a dog as a member of your family, joining in your activities and sitting in your living room, DO NOT get a dog. Both you and the dog you DON'T get will be much happier. The dog you keep continually outside will be miserable, and you will have the annoyance of dealing with a miserable animal on your property.

Large dogs are just as much in need of attentive human companionship as small dogs. In fact, Shepherds and Setters are among the most dependent breeds. Great Danes, Dobermans, as short and thin as their coats are, cannot tolerate the cold winter weather very well.

Here is just one example of a dog's need for human company: There was a Boxer owned by a man whose wife did not want the dog in their living quarters. The Boxer was confined continually basement where it howled, scratched, banged, and made a general nuisance of itself. The wife then decided to allow the dog into the main part of the house, thinking the dog would continue to be a nuisance, and her husband would then get rid of it. However, as soon as the Boxer was allowed to be where its instincts told it had every right to be, it became a quiet, well-mannered family member.

One of the greatest gifts that a dog can offer a human is its devotion. No other living creature will give you more steadfast, abiding love. Fairly treated, dogs are among the world's most joyful animals to own.

A dog becomes sad, lonely and bewildered tied outside its owner's house wondering why it cannot be with its family. It wants to be your happy, devoted, accepted companion. Unless you can accept a dog's offer of this great gift, please DO NOT get a dog! Dogs are considered "pack" animals. They do not tend to be alone or solitary. Domesticated dogs no longer have packs of other dogs to live with, so now want to be members of human families. Also, dogs are "den" animals. This is the reason dogs can be housebroken. Dogs want their den to be clean and secure, so they regard your house as their den.

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## DOG TRAINER'S DIARY

by Carol Benjamin (An Alpha Primer, reprinted AKC GAZETTE)

In dog training, ALPHA is what it's all about. If your bad dog is nasty, ring wise, marking the house, running away when you call him to his bowl, growling when you roll over onto him in your own bed, ALPHA is what it's all about. If your good dog sit/stays in the elevator, listens to anyone who takes his leash, lets you take his food away, does tricks on eye contact alone, looks to you for direction and approval, understands "No" and "Okay", no matter what, comes when called even if he's off leash, out of doors and playing with another dog, ALPHA is what it's all about.

Professional trainers know that it is a waste of time to try to train a dog without first establishing themselves as alpha to the dog. The dog is a pack animal. He must have a leader to listen to and adore. If he doesn't, he takes the role himself. Then he's nasty, ring wise, he's marking the house, he's running away when you call him, scratching an itch when you say "DOWN", breaking his stays, guarding his bowl, growling when you roll over onto him in your own bed. Having so much to do and so little time, professional trainers establish short cuts to becoming alpha to any dog they meet. Of course, the longer they work with dogs, the more alpha they feel. The dog can read this. He can smell it. And this "eau de alpha" reinforces the message delivered by the trainer's behavior and body language: As you learn and use these short cuts, as you begin to feel comfortable in the role of top dog, you'll wear that all important perfume too. These short cuts follow -- and so do some long cuts (my friend John Bramlette's phrase) -- for as you know, dog training is an art, which takes time. So work quickly and work slowly on becoming alpha. Here's how:

- Always praise a dog, anyone's dog, as if you own it. Put your hands firmly on the dog. Hug the dog. Pull the dog into your leg for his hug when he's in the heel position. Pat him so that your hand gets warm from the contact. Do not praise in a timid or offhand way.
- Praise warmly, well and quickly. Do not drag out or draw out your praising of a working dog. Do not fawn over the dog just because he gave one crummy sit. As my first teacher used to say, "He wasn't that good."
- Reprimand fairly and quickly and then forgive. Again, if you are putting your hand on your dog, do so with confidence and authority. No -- hands on does not mean hitting. Hands on may mean a collar shake, a shove, a surprising assist into the sit or down. Or, it may mean a yank on the leash. Do it quickly and with authority. Then when you've made the dog do exactly what you want -- once -- give the beast a hug. That's ALPHA.
- Give permission. Give it for what he is about to do anyway as long as it is okay with you. This does not mean that you say "OK" when you see your dog about to steal the evening roast!! This means you do say OK when your dog is about to get into the car for a motor trip with you, eat the food in his bowl, go out with you for his afternoon constitutional. It means that, in a subtle way, you are teaching the dog to look to you for approval and permission instead of making decisions on his own. This is a good and comfortable set up which is easy to establish and no, it does not turn the dog into a robot. The better behaved the dog, the more freedom and fun he can have.
- Deny permission. Monitor your dog's behavior. Teach him some manners. Even if you like him to walk on your couch and coffee table (You know who you are!), he shouldn't behave that way in other people's homes. When you hike him to the lake, he should wait for permission to swim. It may be too cold some days or there may be too many young children swimming. And he should come onto your bed only with permission, too. More on this very soon. Remember, if you are in charge, you call the shots.

- Do a sit stay. My own very laid back way of becoming alpha in five minutes with a new dog is to put the dog on a sit stay. If he's a wild animal and doesn't know the meaning of obedient, all the better. When he breaks, and he will, I put him back. If he breaks 11 times, I put him back 14 times. You see, I have trained terriers! At the end of the five minutes (ten if it's a terrier), the dog knows you're alpha. No yelling. No hitting. No electronic stimulation. No leaving him in the kennel for three days. Just a sit stay. . .
- Stand tall. Use your voice to express your confidence, your alpha-ness. Use your eyes in a top dog way -- unless you are dealing with a biting lunatic. Breathe like a top dog. Smell like a top dog. What does that mean? Benevolent, but alpha, that's what. Tough but loving. Capable of getting what you want, what's necessary for safety and sanity, that's what. Never jerky, show offy, arbitrarily rough, unfair, sadistic, never! Can a dog understand what's fair and what isn't? You bet!
- Be a model to your dog, as his natural mother was. The top dog behaves with dignity, surety, confidence, authority, and intelligence. He or she is in charge, comfortably. Your comfort in your alpha role will help the dog to be calm. Comfort is contagious. Remember -- he's watching.
- The Hindu proverb says, "A dog is a lion in his own lane." Don't let a lion sleep in your bed! If you've got no problems being alpha and no problems with your dog and you want your dog in your bed, invite him up. Invite him. He should never feel it's his right to sleep in your bed. That would make him your equal, which he is not.
- Indulge in an occasional demonstration of power. Wolves and dogs do this all the time. The alpha wolf will remind the others ritualistically that he is in charge. It may look violent to you -- that grabbing of the muzzle, that tossing of the other onto his or her back, that icy stare over the still, submissive body. But it's not. It is a ritual. It is communication. You can indulge in a demonstration of power symbolically, too. Use the down stay, one hour long, once a day. It's a panacea...It's easy. It says, "I'm alpha." It says, "Calm down." It's humane and effective. It's communication. It's non-violent, yet it does the trick.

What your dog sees, hears and smells; what he feels when he's in your presence should all read ALPHA to him. As you can see, this does not require you to walk around your house growling. Far from it; the more confident you are as "top dog", the more easily you can step into your dog's mother's shoes -- for surely, she was alpha and taught him the power and justness of the role -- the more relaxed and loving your household will be. . With his faith well placed in you, your calm dog knows there are rules and customs to be honored, love and fun to be shared.

With the role of alpha yours, no longer will you have to tiptoe around your own house, hoping against hope not to come upon your dog when he is guarding his plastic frog or chomping on a bone. No longer will you fear a dogfight breaking out when you are least prepared. No longer will you need to spend afternoons searching the neighborhood for your runaway. With order established and the habit of reminding your dog who's who and what's what firmly established, peace will reign and there'll be time and energy for fun. That, too, is what it's all about, this living with dogs.

***(ARMAC CAUTION: Trying the methods listed in the preceding and following articles on an already dominant adult dog could result in you being bitten. If you have a dominant dog that is causing problems, you should seek professional help in dealing with him/her initially.)***

## **DOMINANT DOGS AND AGGRESSIVE DOGS**

By Roy Hunter (reprinted, OFF LEAD MAGAZINE via Inland AC NL, July 1988)

The wording of the Title of this article was deliberately chosen. "Dominant Dogs and Aggressive Dogs", not "Dominant and Aggressive Dogs". Because a dog is dominant, it does not necessarily follow that he is aggressive, not to the normal way of interpreting the word aggression, anyway. The word "dominant" means, according to the Oxford dictionary: RULING, PREVAILING, MOST INFLUENTIAL, OVERLOOKING OTHERS. A dominant dog, in his wild environment, would either be a pack leader, or desire to be pack leader. A dominant dog can be dominated by a dog (or person) that is stronger physically or has a stronger personality than he has. He is quite content to be dominated, provided he knows where he stands. Some dogs that are not really dominant will try to be "pack leader" if no one else appears to want the job! This is where confusion often arises. The dog, in his mind, says, "Well, if you don't want to rule me, then perhaps I should rule you." Someone has to be governor!! The Oxford' dictionary shows the word "aggressive" as meaning: OFFENSIVE, DISPOSED TO ATTACK; FORCEFUL, or SELF-ASSERTIVE. Most dominant people are not usually violent! Because a dog is aggressive, it does not follow that he is dominant. Dominance can be shown by little things such as: demanding to be petted, trying to continually walk in front, etc. Aggression can be caused by many factors other than dominance: jealousy, over-protectiveness (of owner, pack, territory, food, or self), fear, insecurity and sex can all cause aggression.

Each week, I get letters and telephone calls about dominant or aggressive dogs - some come to see me. Some ask me to take their dog for a couple of weeks. Basically, however, the Cure, or Control, must come from the handler/owner. In the old days (note: I don't say "Good Old Days"), I must be getting old myself, - using an expression like that. In the old days, there were many more aggressive and dominant dogs about, especially some strains of Alsatians (as they were then called). The cure that was spoken of when I was a kid was for the new owner to take the dog into a shed, strip off to the waist and with a stick or whip, actually FIGHT the dog until one of them submitted. This was the tale that went about - I never saw it done, and, if it was the practice (rather than just a romantic story), I wonder what happened to the men who submitted, presumably eaten and never seen again!

The story was probably grossly exaggerated, but it does show the way of thinking in those days. Indeed, until relatively recently, the method of the handler establishing his authority (leadership) over the dog was by harsh methods: a harsh, loud voice, the heavy jerks on the check chain, exaggerated hand, arm, and body movements, even blows with the hands, feet and sticks. There is, of course, no need for these cruel methods and, generally, they are counter-productive anyway.

In his wild environment, a dog was a pack animal. This still applies with the small pack of owner/dog and family/dog. The pack leader in a wild pack would tolerate no insubordination from the pack members. Mostly just a look, with a threatening expression, or a growl was sufficient to subdue any challenger, or "wrong doer". Sometimes physical force was used. Body checks, where the pack leader slammed into the flank of the other dog, were the most used punishment; biting only being used as a last resort. Even then, the bite was generally inhibited (a fairly light bite).

If the subordinate did not accept his "punishment", and a fight ensued, this would be quickly terminated when one of the contestants gave in (submitted). In the wild dog environment, the conqueror is prevented by instinct from continuing to attack when his adversary rolls over on his back exposing his throat. Only "mental" dogs would kill another. It is in the interest of the pack for all members to be kept alive. It used to be the same with humans.

Thirty or forty years ago, in a street fight, if one party had had enough he only had to say "I give in" and the fight would end, or if he were knocked down, he only had to lay still with his face exposed and he would be left alone --try that now! Which proves that dogs are more civilized than humans!!

In our conditioning of the dog to be subordinate to us, we do not normally have to go as far as "body checking" and biting. Remember, however, that the pack leader was continually reminding the subordinate of his lowly position. The pack leader ate first. The pack leader drank first. The pack leader walked in front. The pack leader went through gaps first. The pack leader walked in a straight line from "A" to "B", and any dog standing on the route got out of the way - or else! The pack leader decided which "foe" or victim was to be attacked. The leader also controlled any aggression between members of his own pack. It is, therefore, very important that we establish AND MAINTAIN OUR POSITIONS AS PACK LEADER. With our knowledge of these criteria, we can adapt them for our own relationship with a dog. The following methods will do this for us with no unkindness. The more dominant a dog, the more he needs to be reminded of his position in the hierarchy.

1. Tell the dog, "Down". Place him in the "Down" position and keep him there for a half hour. If you allow him to get up when he decides to, he is being allowed to question your authority. You have said, "Down" and he has to stay down until you release him. If he tries to get up, you must physically hold him down. Depending on the size/strength of the dog, either one hand resting lightly on his withers (shoulders), or two hands, one firmly on his withers, the other through his collar. You decide when he can get up. If at twenty-nine minutes, fifty-five seconds, just before you say "free", he decides to get up, you must not give in, even though you were about to release him. He has just earned himself another minute! Half an hour may be boring from you, but you can watch TV, or read a book. Later on, when you are not actually holding him in the down, but still practicing the "long downs", you will have to be more attentive, as you will not feel him give you warning that he is about to move. When you have reached your preconceived-time; release the dog with your "release word"; FREE, Let's Go, etc. whatever you prefer. If he has gone to sleep (some will), wake him before you release him, so that you are letting him go, not him eventually waking up, and then disobeying your original command "Down".

2. Do not allow the dog to eat food until you tell him he can. Tell the dog "Sit", place food bowl down and, after a varying length of time (pause), tell him, "OK".

3. Do not pet the dog when he demands it. He will do this by nudging you with his nose, or pawing at you. Before you pet him under these circumstances, make him earn the petting by obeying a command such as "Sit", "Down" etc. For the same reasons, do not let him crawl up on your lap. If you don't mind having a dog on your lap that is up to you, but you decide when he is to be allowed this privilege, not him.

4. Do not walk around your dog if he is in your way. Make him move.

5. Do not allow him to precede you through any door, gap, gateway or opening.

6. Do not allow him to jump in or out of the car just because you have opened the door. He does so when you tell him.

7. Enforce any commands you give. If he is on the couch and you say, "OFF", then he is to get off. Ensure you are in a position to enforce any command before you give it. If he does happen to catch you unaware, and disobeys when you can do nothing about it (refused recall, etc.), do not repeat the command, but ensure that you can enforce it next time you give it. In the

example "Refused Recall", don't call him again; he will come to you eventually. When he comes, you must praise him but, NEXT TIME he will be on a long line, thus ensuring obedience. If your dog challenges you, as when you go to take his food bowl away, do not make an issue of it on that occasion; back off slowly without any further argument. Next day, have the dog on a leash and check chain when you feed him and then take the dish. If he challenges you then, you are in a position to look after yourself and enforce his subordination.

8. Do go to a Dog Club so that he learns to obey commands and mix with others and you learn under supervision.

9. Do intervene quickly and ruthlessly if your dog shows aggression to another dog, person or yourself. By INTERVENE, I mean act effectively BEFORE the aggression by the dog is put into action. Your action is with your harsh and firm voice (not necessarily loud), and the hard jerking of the check chain with the leash. The heaviness, or harshness of the jerk is determined by the dog's size, tough sensitivity (pain threshold), and temperament. If you are too gentle, you will just stimulate the dog to greater aggression or cause him to think you are a drip, wimp or wally and ignore you.

10. DO NOT praise the dog when he ceases to show aggression after "9" above. If you have had to "intervene", then it is very important that you do not praise or fuss afterward. Please read this again and stick to it.

11. Do praise the dog when he shows no aggression to that particular dog or person WITHOUT you having to "intervene".

12. Do be able to take food, bones, or toys away from your dog, but DO NOT practice this too often.

13. Do practice giving him extra food, bones or toys when he already has some. Do this more frequently than taking things from him.

Do not make his life a misery by keeping on practicing the points above, BUT do be consistent and any conduct that YOU consider undesirable must NEVER be allowed. It is no good if you sometimes permit certain things and at other times you don't. For example, it is no good allowing your dog to jump up on you when you are wearing old clothes and getting cross when he does the same thing when you've got your best suit on. It is not good giving him an old shoe to chew on and then losing your temper when he chews your brand new ones. Any variations on your part will cause your dog to become confused. BE CONSISTENT. BE PERSISTENT.

## TRUST -- A DEADLY DISEASE

By Sharon Mathers

*Courtesy of Canine Concepts and Community Control magazine, September 1986*

There is a deadly disease stalking your dog; a hideous, stealthy thing just waiting its chance to steal your beloved friend. It is not a new disease, or one for which there are inoculations. The disease is called TRUST.

You knew before you ever took your puppy home that it could not be trusted. The breeder who provided you with this precious animal warned you, drummed it into your head. Puppies steal off counters, destroy anything expensive, chase cats, take forever to house train, and must never be allowed off lead.

When the big day finally arrived, heeding the sage advice of the breeder, you escorted your puppy to his new home, properly collared and tagged, the lead held tightly in your hand. At home, the house was "puppy-proofed". Everything of value was stored in the spare bedroom, garbage stowed on top of the refrigerator, cats separated, and a gate placed across the door of the living room to keep at least some part of the house puddle free. All windows and doors had been properly secured, and signs placed in all strategic points reminding all to "CLOSE THE DOOR!"

Soon it becomes second nature to make sure the door closes .9 of a second after it was opened and that it really latched. "DON'T LET THE DOG out" is your second most verbalized expression. (The first is "NO!") You worry and fuss constantly, terrified that your darling will get out and a disaster will surely follow. Your friends comment about whom you love most, your family or the dog. You know that to relax your vigil for a moment might lose him to you forever. And so the weeks and months pass, with your puppy becoming more civilized every day, and the seeds of trust are planted. It seems that each new day brings less destruction, less breakage. Almost before you know it your gangly, slurpy puppy has turned into an elegant, dignified friend.

Now that he is a more reliable, sedate companion, you take him more places. No longer does he chew the steering wheel when left in the car. And darned if that cake wasn't still on the counter this morning. And, oh yes, wasn't that the cat he was sleeping with so cozily on your pillow last night?

At this point you are beginning to become infected. The disease is spreading its roots deep into your mind. And then one of your friends suggests obedience. You shake your head and remind her that your dog might run away if allowed off lead, but you are reassured when she promises the events are held in a fenced area. And, wonder of wonders, he did not run away, but came every time you called him!

All winter long you go to weekly obedience classes. And, after a time, you even let him run loose from the car to the house when you get home. Why not, he always runs straight to the door, dancing in a frenzy of joy and waits to be let in. And, remember he comes every time he is called. You know he is the exception that proves the rule. (And sometimes late at night, you even let him slip out the front door to go potty and then right back in.)

At this point the disease has taken hold, waiting only for the right time and place to rear its ugly head.

Years pass - it is hard to remember why you ever worried so much when he was a puppy. He would never think of running out of the door left open while you bring in packages from the car. It would be beneath his dignity to jump out of the window of the car while you run into the convenience store. And when you take him for those wonderful long walks at dawn, it only takes one whistle to send him racing back to you in a burst of speed when the walk comes too close to the highway. (He still gets into the garbage, but nobody is perfect!)

This is the time the disease has waited for so patiently. Sometimes it only has to wait a year or two, but often it takes much longer. He spies the neighbor dog across the street, and suddenly forgets everything he ever knew about not slipping outdoors, jumping out windows or coming when called due to traffic. Perhaps it wasn't a dog, but a paper fluttering in the breeze, or even just the sheer joy of running. A Life is stopped in an instant. Stilled forever - Your heart is as broken as his still beautiful body. The disease is TRUST. The final outcome: hit by a car.

Every morning my dog, Shah, bounced around off lead exploring: Every morning for seven years he came back when he was called. He was perfectly obedient, perfectly trustworthy. He died Fourteen hours after being hit by a car. .

Please do not risk your friend and your heart. Save the trust for things that do not matter.

## **USEFUL COMPANION OR LETHAL WEAPON -- MAKE A CHOICE**

By Mardi Dowling (reprinted, "Akita World", November 1983)

In horses, we blindfold them and if they are not careful to protect themselves, but instead thrash around and crash into fences, etc., we know the horse is crazy and could be danger to himself or others. I wish we had such a simple test for Akitas. Granted, there are times when something is physically wrong; a tumor for instance, that literally causes a dog to go bad. In such instances, the Akita should be humanely put to sleep; regardless of how loving he is when the influencing factor is not affecting him.

Because our Akitas are both aggressive and dignified, I believe there are some whose attitudes are too keyed into the wild to be totally safe. This does not mean that such Akitas are "bad"; it just means that the natural reactions of the wild are not softened enough for the Akita to make a value judgment – so they react as an undomesticated animal would. These Akitas need to have a carefully structured life. If you are not willing to be responsible for this type of Akita, it should be euthanized, not passed on to a unwary home. In the wild, those members of the pack who are hurt and not salvageable are put out of their misery, often referred to as: "They are turned on and killed".

Danger signals are: 1) the Akita pup that frequently attacks you as you pass by his food bowl in spite of repeated discipline; 2) the Akita pup that never gives up going after something even though restrained and disciplined; and 3) upon maturity, but sometimes sooner, the Akita that comes running to a crying child, not with licks and reassurances, but with an intense resolve.

In my mind, there is a vital difference between discipline and training. In training, various instructors have promoted an assortment of means and equipment to accomplish specific things with various breeds of dogs. There is nothing wrong with what they have done as long as it suits you and your dog's personality and traits. Except in rare instances, canines, wild or domestic, do not train each other. So, all the man-made ideas and equipment, as long as humane, are fine for training as long as they suit both you and your dog.

There is no question as to who is pack leader when disciplining. Discipline should be immediate and on a level of the seriousness of the infraction and clearly understood as such. In no instance does a canine "swat" or "spank" another canine, but they all, wild or domestic, shake by the scruff of the neck if a warning growl does not stop the errant behavior. In some cases, the offender is thrown to the ground. In no case is the offender choked into submission. Whether to submit or fight is dependent upon the offender. The sooner we follow through with this simplistic approach to discipline, the sooner the pup will understand more readily what is expected of him before dignity sets in to complicate things in the future.

I have heard Akita owners, usually men but not always, mention that their Akita challenges them on what seems to be a regular basis, such as once a year. It seems to be (forgive me, men) a matter of pride that you are able to force your dog to submit. In instances where a dog is allowed to challenge a person for leadership, you as a trainer have not established yourself as the pack leader. Although you are initiating training and controlling the situation, you are giving the dog a choice in as pleasant a manner as possible. Certainly, discipline that allows an Akita to challenge a person for leadership works in a lot of cases, but not in all cases.

The recent tragedy in Maryland where an Akita killed a three-year-old boy is what I would hope to prevent by either weeding out a mentally unsound animal or by correct, understandable discipline for the dog. Look for potential problems and head them off before they become a real problem. Don't hide ostrich-like with your head in the sand while you hope your pup "outgrows" his behavior that may lead to disaster.

I have found that puppy owners who "shake by the scruff of the neck" for discipline, do so with good results, until they get into obedience. Many times you will find a growling dog provoked into something worse by the so called "stringing up" he gets with his collar. I know there is a time and place for discipline using a choke collar, but why not head off that situation by shaking? If I did not understand or like a situation and I suddenly found myself choking to death, I would certainly fight back, and resent the person inflicting the choke. On the other hand, a verbal command from a person I respect (parent, spouse, police officer) would bring about the needed response. The Akita is not human but similarities in response can be drawn to bring about a little more understanding. Various physical, combative type human responses when disciplining put you on your Akita's level. If this happens continually, believe me when I say, there will come a day when the Akita, particularly a male, will win.

I advocate shaking by the scruff of the neck because: 1) the dog understands and accepts this form of punishment; 2) it does not break the spirit of the Akita unless unfairly and severely overdone (I have yet to see any cowering except from yelling and spanking); 3) there is no equipment required; 4) nothing is expected of the dog except to stop growling and cry and/or submit; 5) only a self-assured authority (i.e. pack leader) would do this; 6) it is not life threatening; 7) it is totally reproduced in nature, finally, 8) because it works! When it does not work, you know you have a problem dog. There is specific guidelines set down by nature; the dog knows how to respond to given situations. If he continually defies normal responses, you know this dog is out of control by norms set by humans as well as nature.

If, after carefully evaluating the dog's responses, he does not react normally to discipline - seek help immediately! If the help is to no avail, then it is time to consider having the dog destroyed. For your peace of mind and the dog's, it is better to destroy a sometimes-good dog than to allow a potential killer to be free. The more you understand nature, the less likely it is you will ever be faced with this decision.

Once again, I raise my voice to ask you to choose to mold your Akita into a useful companion. I not only ask you, I beg you! Particularly now since some money hungry fools have managed to make the Akita look like "The Dog" to own. Ignorant novices seek to raise their status with an Akita because of recent exposure in non-dog publications. Then follows the sales pitch something like "...this is the only breed for you." As a result, all Akitas whelped are sold for "mucho bucks", and these breeders amazingly can even sleep at night

Do not own an Akita if you cannot be responsible for his death as well as his life!

***(ARMAC CAUTION: This article pertains to puppies. The scruff of the neck punishment should only be used with puppies. Trying this on an adult dog could prove very hazardous in that a dominant adult, especially one unfamiliar to you, will take violent exception to it.)***

## MEDICAL CONDITIONS OF OUR BREED

By Liz Harrell

The following was researched and written by Liz Harrell and presented at the 1983 National Specialty during a seminar. In Liz's absence, Andy Mershon read it to the group. (Special thanks to Sylvia Thomas for recording the talk and to Barbara Bouyet for painstakingly transcribing and spelling the difficult words.)

The Akita has been a recognized breed for ten years. In that time, Akitas have become very popular. In 1963, you might have found two or three small ads for Akitas squeezed in between other miscellaneous ads in Dog World. Twenty years later, Dog World carries several full pages of ads for Akitas, all of which, those ads assure us, are produced from the very best stock which has been championed, tested, certified, guaranteed, etc. Is the current status of our breed really this marvelous? Or would it be closer to the truth to say that the great popularity and corresponding great increase in numbers has adversely affected the breed in some ways. This presentation will examine the Akita as it now exists and we will limit the discussion to medical problems inherited and otherwise.

**HIP DYSPLASIA** is a problem for all dogs. If you think large dogs are the only ones involved, consider this. A research program done in England a few years ago brought to light the fact that one of the breeds most involved was the tiny Brussels Griffon, a ten-pound dog. Hip dysplasia will be with us for a long time to come, so it would be wise to know as much as possible about this problem.

In the last twenty years, many theories about hip dysplasia have surfaced and disappeared. When the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals first began scanning x-rays, certification of free from dysplastic problems was given at twelve months. Then it became evident that changes took place within the joint after twelve months, so certification was then granted to normal at twenty-four months of age. Today many breed Clubs specify in their "codes of ethics" that no breeding may be done, prior to thirty-six months of age. This is because many dogs have been found to have arthritic changes after twenty-four months. The dog certified as normal at two years may not be certifiable at three or four years. You cannot assume that every certified dog will be normal for the rest of its life. Most will but some will not.

The Swedish Canine Corp. did a ten-year study of hip dysplasia. They x-rayed breeding stock and kept working detailed records of what was produced by breeding normal to normals, normals to dysplastic and dysplastic to dysplastic: At the end of ten years, they discovered they were getting the exact same percentage of dysplasia from breeding normals to normals that they were getting when the study started. In short, although the percentages varied up and down over the years, the average for the ten-year period was the same as when the project started.

To some, this means to stop x-raying, breed for whatever moves well and looks good. A lot of breeders are pursuing this idea and in a few years, we'll know their success or their failure. Particularly if it's a failure! Nothing surfaces faster than bad news.

I think most of us have come to the conclusion that hip dysplasia is a very complex problem. While it is certainly inherited, we must also accept the fact that the environment appears to be involved as well. Environment in this case means health and well-being. If a growing dog becomes ill with a viral or bacterial infection, the results of this illness may show up in his x-rays. Viruses and bacteria can cross the synovial barrier and produce arthritic changes within the joint capsule.

In another large breed, a litter of six pups was x-rayed at six months because they were observed to be weak in the rear. The x-rays showed considerable arthritic problems in the hips of all six. They were destroyed and postmortem examinations were made. Something very

interesting was discovered. The fluid in the synovial sacs of the hips, shoulders and knees contained pseudomonas. The dam of this litter had been treated for pseudomonas uterine infection for two weeks prior to being bred. She'd been tested and thought free of pseudomonas when she was bred. The irritation and resultant arthritic buildup in those pups was from pseudomonas. No one will ever know how many of them would have been otherwise normal. Another environmental factor can be nutrition. When an animal is growing, it needs proper and balanced nutrition. Too little of the necessary nutrients can rob the dog of what it needs to produce bone, ligaments, nerve fiber, etc. The dogs fed whatever is on sale at the local supermarket will not likely prosper and will, in the case of a female, have little to pass on to her get when she's bred. You will get from your animal precisely what you have given the animal. Don't expect a bargain sale fed animal to produce more than bargain sale pups. A slight exaggeration, but I think you get the idea.

The fat pup is in almost as bad a position. Fat pups are cute, but the excess weight produces stress on the joints and results in splayed feet, sway backs and a lot less than average chance of having good hips, knees, etc. If too much stress is put on the joints when the dog is growing, that dog may never reach its full potential, even if it slims down as it gets older. There's one other aspect to hip dysplasia that all breeders would be wise to consider. The medical profession has been investigating arthritis in humans for a long, long time. The current thinking is that arthritis might be caused by the body's own immune system. That is something in the body triggers the immune system to put down bone deposits in the joints, on the spine, or wherever the programming directs. This could happen after a viral or bacterial infection, especially if the immune system overreacts. It is also possible that some animals are born with an overactive immune system which can be triggered to act against the body's own cells. This is autoimmunity and it is an inherited factor.

We know that the Akita is involved in hip dysplasia. We know that hip dysplasia is a very complex problem involving inheritance, the genes from the parents for normal or dysplastic hips, environment, the animal's health, welfare, plus the additional inherited possibility of a good immune system. Obviously, hip dysplasia must be given great consideration by those who are to produce sound and strong moving animals.

The next important problem concerns **ENTROPION**. About thirty years ago, the Akikyo Club in Japan published a book about the Akita in which considerable space is given to problems in breeding Akitas. One picture clearly shows an Akita with a characteristic rolled-in lid. Entropion causes the lid of the eye to roll inward allowing lashes to scrape the eyeball. This causes irritation and, in time, can affect the eye. This is an inherited problem. Six to eight week old pups can show the problem. One way it's manifested is that a wet patch appears around the eye and the pup will paw at the eye on occasion.

Examination will show the lower lid is probably turning inward at the outer rim. In severe cases, both upper and lower lids can be involved. Sometimes only one pup in a litter is affected, but there have been litters in which 80% of the pups had the problem.

Entropion is a recessive gene and can skip one or two generations. Without intending to, some breeders have selected for breeding animals carrying the gene for entropion. Consequently, in some strains of the breed, the problem of entropion is now considered to be a dominant rather than recessive. How dominant entropion becomes in Akitas depends on how the breeders select their stock. The decisions made now, will determine whether or not litters of Akitas will be presented to the local ophthalmologist for corrective surgery, as is now the case with Chows, Shar-Peis, etc. Surgically correcting entropion is a very minor procedure. Once done, the eye can pass for normal in every way and it's no secret that many dogs have been shown after surgery. Some believe entropion can be treated in the breed by selecting breeding animals without loose facial skin, and too much wrinkle. This must be a valid theory if one limits the discussion to breeds like Chows and Shar-Peis. However, the Irish Setter is also deeply

involved with entropion and it would be hard to make a case based on the loose facial skin theory for Setters. Bacterial invasion can produce a temporary form of entropion. As the eyelid swells, it rolls inward causing the lashes to scrape the eye just as in the inherited type. In this case, a culture should be made of the eye secretion and treatment started as soon as possible. When the swelling reduces, the lid returns to normal. A blow to the eye can cause the same temporary type of swelling. Allergic reactions to insect bites, bees in particular, will also cause temporary entropion. Bee stings can also cause the ears to swell and droop at the same time if the bite is located on the head. Immediate treatment with antihistamines and steroids will reverse the situation and the eyes and ears will return to normal.

Another problem in our breed is **COAT**. You probably think that while it's definitely a problem, it certainly couldn't be considered medical...Here are a few things you might want to consider.

Akita pedigrees done in Japan just prior to, and after 1900, show these dogs have ancestors listed as "foreign dog" "unknown", etc. About this time, Japan had opened up to world trade and one of the most popular gifts used by traders to impress those with whom they wished to do business were dogs. Most impressive was the Mastiff. In fact, one Japanese gentleman with whom I corresponded, and the third generation of his family to breed Akitas, told me he was certain the brindle coloring came from Mastiffs brought to Japan from the Netherlands. Some feel that the short coat seen in present-day Akitas might be traced to the Mastiff-Akita crosses in those 'early days.

Some long hair in our breed comes from the Karafuto, which is another Japanese breed. You may remember a few years ago there was a Japanese participation in the geophysical studies down in Antarctica. The dogs used in the Japanese expedition were Karafutos. They're a large dog with medium bone and pricked ears, resembling the Akita but with head, body and coat looking more like a Belgian Tervuren. So, here at least, two different types of dogs crossed with Akitas. There were actually more but for this discussion, we'll consider only the Mastiff and the Karafuto.

The Mastiff would bring to any breeding, not only his short coat, but also a skeleton different from that of the Akita. The tail carriage, ears and head shape, particularly the muzzle, are all very different from our breed. The Karafuto would bring the long coat, medium bone, narrow chest, high loin and loose tail curl. Now, considering whatever else has come down in today's Akitas from past crosses, there well may have come inherited problems from these outside breedings at the time, too. In short, perpetuating coat problems may also be perpetuating a few other goodies as well.

**BLOAT** is definitely a problem in Akitas. The term "bloat" includes anything from simple gas attacks to torsion to intussusception and strangulation. Dogs that forage and ingest unusual foodstuffs can suffer a gas attack as a result of their feeding habits. Some things causing gas include apples, cabbage, onions, and decaying meat. The gas forms a bubble in the stomach and the resultant pain will make expelling the gas in either direction impossible. A tube run through the mouth into the stomach will relieve the gas at once, after which some soothing liquid like Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol, Milk of Magnesia, etc. should be put in the dog's stomach to soothe the stomach lining. change in the dog's eating habits is necessary. Bear in mind that a simple gas attack can escalate into torsion very easily and torsion is not so easy to correct. When the stomach inflates with so much gas that it becomes distended, it starts to rotate. Picture a balloon with the input valve on one end and output on the other. Fill the balloon part way with fluid and the rest with air. Notice how easily the balloon can rotate on the two valves anywhere from a few degrees to 360. That's what torsion is. The twisted input tube makes it impossible to get the stomach pumped through the tube that slides down into the stomach. The twisted output valve makes it impossible for the gas to go in that direction. As the stomach gets

larger and larger, it pushes into the spleen, which also starts to rotate, cutting off the blood supply to the spleen. Now there are two serious problems to correct.

Large animal veterinarians approach this problem somewhat differently than small animal vets. Some large animal vets work on horses and cows, which also suffer from bloat. They have more opportunity to cope. The usual procedure here is to insert a large needle through the abdominal wall to draw off gas as soon as possible. When the stomach deflates, it can often be turned enough to allow the stomach pump in and the rest of the gas and stomach contents can be drawn off without resorting to surgery. If the spleen has not been damaged, it should return to normal when the pressure recedes. Small animal vets, however, usually opt for immediate surgery and manually returning the stomach to normal. Most dogs will live through this experience if they get to the vet before gross damage has been done. If you suspect your dog is in bloat, every minute is precious. If the dog is in bloat a long time (45 minutes or less) before treatment is started, pressure on the body cavity may be too severe for the heart to withstand.

There's a dichotomy of opinion on this. Some feel that there is a heart problem prior to the onset of bloat and the rest feel that heart involvement is a result of bloat. I tend to believe in the latter because if there's one thing that's super strong in an Akita, it is its heart. The stresses of pressure in the stomach too long distended by bloat often causes small blood vessels to rupture and the resultant bleeding can cause death.

Bloat must not be ignored. If your dog looks bulgy, is pacing with anxiety and drooling a bit, he cannot sit or lie down comfortably and is in general distress; get moving, get to a vet!!

INTUSSUSCEPTION is the telescoping of the intestine upon itself, often the result of a prolonged session of diarrhea in puppies. It can also appear in adults. The only solution is surgery. It's rarely successful on pups, but older dogs have a far better chance. The affected section of the intestine is removed and the ends are sewn together.

STRANGULATION occurs when a section of the intestine loops through a tear in the mesentery and hangs out in an area of the abdomen where it doesn't belong. This must be corrected surgically.

What most dog owners do not know is that all four of these bloat situations tend to repeat. In short, if it happened once, it will likely happen again, so be prepared.

Akitas are **sensitive to sedation**. Every year several Akitas sedated for hip x-rays or surgery die. Most deaths occur as a result of a combination of drugs. For example, acepromazine and suritol seem safe enough when given separately, but seem to cause problems when given together. Some of these drugs have side effects the owners seldom see.

For instance, a young female of mine was given a slight overdose of suritol and suffered forty-five minutes of hallucinations when the drug was wearing off. I held her during this time because she was thrashing around and banging her head on the concrete floor. This took place in the vet's office where I'd taken her for a hip x-ray.

As for acepromazine, there is a record of a case of a young female taken to emergency for removal of a foxtail in her nose on a Saturday noon. By the following Monday evening, she still could not stand, swallow or control her urine. This dog did not overreact to the sedation; she was overdosed.

When major surgery is necessary, most veterinarians will use gas. The dog is mildly tranquilized so gas equipment can be inserted in the throat. Most hospitals now use monitoring devices—controlling the flow of gas and/or oxygen depending on the need. Also, the vital signs are checked constantly, either by an assistant or by machine. Most surgeries go along without incident. Occasionally though, a dog will react adversely to the gas and will show this by an elevated heartbeat, sometimes over twice normal. Procedures are set in motion at once to bring the dog back to normal heartbeat. If the heart reacts well, the dog will be fine. If the heart is quite slow in reacting, the dog will make it, but he might have an enlarged heart the rest of his

life. If the heartbeat can't be controlled, the dog will die. There are many drugs available now to correct this situation and you can bet your veterinarian is well-prepared before he ever starts a surgery.

Sometimes dogs are tranquilized with rompun. In most cases, there's no problem although brain damage can result if the dog is overdosed. The animal will be very slow in recovering; you can see breathing and swallowing difficulties, and also a staggering gait if the animal can get up and walk. Sometimes one person will look at a dog and estimate his weight at 125 pounds. Another, at the same time, may estimate the weight at 85 pounds. This is a great way to overdose a dog if the second guess was correct. It is true that breeds react differently to sedation. In an experiment, I watched a really hyper 30-pound dog that was given 3cc of sedation. It hardly slowed him down. One half of 1 cc of the same sedation would knock out an average-sized adult Akita. Different breeds have different responses.

*(ARMAC NOTE: Now, most veterinarians use a very safe anesthesia call Isoflurine. This was not available when this article was written)*

Judging from letters and phone calls received in the last few years, **infertility** is on the rise in several strains of our breed. This is a complex problem and cannot be covered in a few paragraphs but here are just a few ideas.

Most of the animals exhibiting infertility problems are those that have been shown a great deal. Two possibilities come to mind. One, the dog owner must realize that dog show circuits are very stressful on a dog. Under stress, the immune system may not function as well as usual and the animal may become more susceptible to low grade infection. If the circuits are long and showing pretty continuous, the infection could become chronic. The dog may only act tired, not too unusual on a long trip. The dog's system may be keeping the bacteria at a low level but this sort of situation can interfere with sperm production as well as form and motility of the sperm.

An example from a veterinarian specializing in reproductive problems: A small breed male had been bred to five bitches, none of which produced puppies. Since he was about the top dog of his breed in the U.S., the owner was really worried.

Tests showed the dog has a low-grade infection, very low sperm count and those sperm were not well formed and had very low motility. After six weeks of treatment, the tests showed no infection, good sperm count and the form and motility were again normal. The first bitch he bred produced five pups. Almost constant showing had contributed to making him a top dog of his breed. He's still shown but now the owner gives him ample time to rest and recuperate, therefore keeping him in top breeding condition as well as top show condition.

For owners of females, during heat the cervix is open and the vulva enlarged creating a perfect setup for bacteria. There is no better incubator for bacteria than the bitch's uterus. If she has been bred, bacteria can grow right along with the fetuses. Some of the bacteria that thrive in these circumstances cannot be disposed of easily and may proliferate on successive heats. Pseudomonas, for example, can be responsible for dead pups in a litter and death will ensue in a few days with pups born alive unless the problem is recognized and treatment is started. No doubt there are Akitas who have inherited a lack of interest in breeding. Some feel this is related to the number of cryptorchidians within the strain. I doubt this theory. However, as more and more cryptorchids appear in our breed, we will be able to test this. I think some males may be just below par for producing sperm and some females may not produce enough eggs in their lifetime.

I think the majority of infertility problems are related to stress, long show circuits, depressed living conditions, poor nutrition, etc. The decision the dog owner must make is this: Is showing of greater importance to the breed than producing? You must be the judge.

**EPILEPSY** is also a problem in the Akita. It's a symptom of a serious dysfunction within the brain, an abnormal electrical discharge that can affect the brain, the brain stem, or the spinal cord. Idiopathic or true epilepsy is considered an inherited problem in several breeds: Shepherds, Setters, Poodles, Saint Bernard's, German Shorthair Pointers, to name a few. This form of epilepsy cannot be cured but it can be controlled with medication. The dog can live a fairly normal life but, obviously, should not be put to the stress of showing and certainly should not be bred.

Acquired or false epilepsy is a temporary situation that can be caused by toxic materials such as lead, cyanide, phosphates, chlorinated hydrocarbons, distemper, parasites, low blood sugar, electrolyte imbalance, hyperthermia, brain tumors, or a buildup of bone deposits in the inner surface of the skull in elderly dogs. An epilepsy attack is very frightening for both the dog and the owner. Fainting and convulsions occur.

Seizures may last for several minutes. Soon the dog recovers and acts quite normal. Seizures will not kill the dog unless they come at too frequent intervals. This is a difficult problem for veterinarians to diagnose without a good description of what actually happened and the owner should be as complete as possible in describing the occurrence since the veterinarian must rely a lot on the owners' observations. If epilepsy is suspected, tests can be run and the animal can be treated. In the case of acquired epilepsy, usually once the source of the trouble is established and dealt with, the dog can respond and return to normal. It all depends on how much damage was done.

Now for some more esoteric diseases that are starting to come to light in our breed -- as it we didn't have enough problems.

**PROGRESSIVE RETINAL ATROPHY** has been found in Akitas. This is a situation that is not reversible, so once encountered there is no doubt the dog will eventually become blind. The disease is inherited. It varies from dog to dog. In some, progress is rapid and blindness can ensue in a few weeks time. In others, it may take several months before blindness occurs.

There are other problems that can involve the retina such as retinal damage due to distemper, so if you suspect your dog may have PRA, consult an ophthalmologist as soon as possible. If the diagnosis is PRA, then you must decide how to handle the problem. Blind dogs can lead a pretty useful life but the owner must be willing to accept the responsibility for the extra care the dog requires.

You should also notify the dogs breeder so that he or she will know that one or both of the parents of your dog is carrying PRA. Some experts in the field of eye disorders feel that PRA is an immune response problem.

**MICROTHALMIA** or "small eye" syndrome seems to be one of our more recent problems. The only time I've seen this was several years ago. I'd been invited to look at a litter of seven-week-old pups, the product of a father/daughter mating. There were seven pups, part of which had very small eyes. In this case, the small eyes were secondary to the main problem, which was hydrocephalus. I wonder how many small eye problems are in Akitas related to this litter. Some experts feel that small eyes maybe associated with detached retinas and congenital cataracts. Also, geneticists feel that there is a relationship between hydrocephalus, eye abnormalities, nervous seizures and cryptorchidism, and therefore relate these problems to inherited hormonal defects.

The eye, particularly the retina, is affected because like any other part of the body, it depends on a supply of blood to keep it fed and healthy. If the body is fighting a battle with a viral or bacterial infection it will be reflected in the eye. If the blood supply is contaminated, the eye will be affected just like any other part of the body with this one big difference -- the eye is like a window, and changes within the eye can be observed when the dog is examined. This is often important, too, in making a diagnosis of an illness.

**UVEITIS** is the inflammation of the iris in the eye and sometimes the ciliary part of the eye, in short, the pigmented part of the eye. One authority on the subject of eyes divides the iris problem into two classes: acute recent sudden onset is called iritis or iridocyclitis. The chronic or longtime problem is called uveitis. Iritis can be the result of systemic disorders such as an infected prostate, inflamed sinus, pyometra, distemper, hepatitis, infected tonsils, or skin disorders like pemphigus. Although it is believed that systemic problems can trigger a uveitis situation, the feeling is that something else more serious has to be involved to create such a massive reaction. This is where the idea of autoimmunity comes in.

Example: The dog may have an autoimmune problem that has never become apparent because the body and immune system have remained in some sort of balance. When a systemic invasion triggers a reaction, the balance may be lost forever. In the newborn and elderly, the immune system is weakest. There are animals that have very little immune systems all their lives and are consequently wide open to any virus or bacteria that happens along. This is immune deficient. The opposite, when the body has such an over-reactive immune system that the system attacks the body's own cells, is called autoimmune. Lupus, pemphigus and VKH syndrome are all immune related diseases.

In a recent publication limited to skin disorders, I was surprised to see Akitas used to illustrate **pemphigus foliaceus** and **Voight Kayanaga Harada** (VKH) syndrome. These two problems look a lot alike except for eye involvement and may often be confused with each other or with lupus. Facial skin, nerves, tongue, lips and sometimes even footpads can be affected. There are skin eruptions followed by crusting over with later loss of pigmentation of the skin. In advanced cases, there may also be swelling of the legs and feet, very high temperatures, lethargy and loss of appetite. In VKH syndrome, uveitis is also present.

*(**ARMAC NOTE:** Panepidermal Pustular Pemphigus is the most common form of pemphigus in Akitas, affecting 32% of the 31 cases examined in 1998. It is characterized by pigment loss on and around the nose, eyes and ears. Differentiated from other skin diseases by formation of large blisters and pustules that cover other areas of the body. It is positively diagnosed by the presence of acantholytic cells. Uveodermatological Syndrome, most commonly, VKH (Vogt-Koyanagi-Harada). It is characterized by depigmentation on nose that is exacerbated by exposure to sunlight. It also affects skin and eyes with eventual vision loss. 6% of the 31 cases examined in 1998 were uveodermatological Syndrome)*

**SKIN PROBLEMS** in the Akita may be secondary to other diseases. Two examples are the loss of pigmentation and resultant redness of the eye rim, lips and nose of the dog suffering from lymph sarcoma, or the loss of hair, redness of skin and moist skin of the animal with lupus erythematosus. When a skin disorder is persistent and it's obviously not our old complaint of flea allergy, the dog owner has to accept the possibility that something more serious may be happening to his dog.

*(**ARMAC NOTE:** In recent years, **Sebaceous Adenitis**, an autoimmune skin condition, has been discovered in the breed. The biggest complication of skin diseases such as Sebaceous Adenitis (SA) and others is the separation of the human-animal bond. Most people have difficulty adjusting to their pets when they have massive hair loss, scabbing and scaling, and unpleasant odor related to symptoms of skin diseases. Those who cannot cope, or whose pets do not respond to treatment usually put their pets down. But affected dogs can and do live full and productive lives with some of the less severe skin diseases. The stratum corneum or upper layer of skin is essential for life and appears as a "basket weave" under the microscope. Changes to the stratum corneum result in an inability to provide adequate protection from germs and infections set in. With skin diseases, there is a change in the maturation of the stratum corneum and instead of the skin sloughing off gradually in*

*small microscopic flakes as it does in healthy skin, it resorts to a more primitive state with abnormal sloughing of large flakes.)*

Changes also occur with the oil secreting (sebaceous) glands and ducts that lay deeper in the skin. Nutrition seems to play a role and that the lipid (oil) secretion composition of the sebaceous glands change in diseases such as SA.

Basically there are two types of SA: (1) Primary - inflammation is limited to the sebaceous glands and ducts, and (2) Secondary - sebaceous glands are destroyed as part of a larger more diffuse inflammatory response.

SA affects many breeds, but in the 31 samples from Akitas examined in 1998, 45% were positively diagnosed as SA. The typical method for testing is a punch biopsy of the affected skin. Diagnosis of SA is confirmed from positive identification of inflamed sebaceous glands in skin sample. It is sometimes difficult to diagnose because a dog may not have the punch biopsies done in an area where the disease is exhibited.

Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a pattern or prediction to the amount of hair loss (alopecia) in SA dogs. Some dogs exhibit only sub clinical symptoms and minimal hair loss, whereas others have a very sparse or no coat at all. Usually hair loss is accompanied by visible clumps of solid waxy sebaceous secretions attached to the root of the hair. There aren't any known treatment or medication for this disease, but that some people have had varying results with all sorts of different home treatments. (see [www.akita.de](http://www.akita.de) or [www.akita-friends.com/special/satreat.htm](http://www.akita-friends.com/special/satreat.htm) for information on oil bath treatments.) Surprisingly that some cases spontaneously clear up on their own. One dog whose owner decided that she wasn't going to treat a rather severe case of SA in her dog and within months it had completely recovered with a full coat. One ARMAC dog that came in with SA, recovered most of his coat when placed in his new home.)

A small percentage of our breed is involved in problems like **phemphigus, lupus, PRA, VKH syndrome**, etc. It's really nothing to get worried about except for one thing. These are all thought to be immune related diseases, so the people breeding Akitas should include a good immune system as part of their breeding plans. An immune system, good or bad is inherited. (ARMAC NOTE: autoimmune diseases are much more wide-spread now in our breed than at the time this article was written. For more information on these problems and others, go to [www.akitaclub.org](http://www.akitaclub.org) and click on Akita Health.)

As each generation of Akitas is formed, it becomes more and more important for the breeder to know the background of his stock, at least through the great-grandparents and including as many siblings as possible. If you proceed with the breeding knowing only that both dogs are winners, you will have only yourself to blame. Many a winner carries a gene package only a fool would breed. The fact that an animal has become a champion has no relation to how that animal may rate as a producer, and I speak of quality, not quantity.

Novices hold the future of the breed in their hands. If the people they have bought, or are buying from cannot give detailed information about their dogs, my advice is to look elsewhere or the first litter might be full of surprises. If you go into breeding knowing full well what the circumstances are, you're not likely to be surprised. If you go into a breeding knowing nothing of the ancestors or their problems, you can always write a book about your bad experiences.

We must all believe the Akita is a wonderful animal or we would not be exchanging ideas and trying to learn. We observe and recognize the problems that have been brought to light in the last ten years and we use this information as a learning process. Keep the Akita a strong and vital animal. Don't allow this magnificent beast to erode into mediocrity.