

Meet Leo: A Big Dog That Becomes One Of The Family

Leonberger (Leos) dogs are big, have lots of hair and require attention. They aren't for everyone. But for people who love the breed, no other dog comes close.

"We embrace the hair. They live in the house and want to be part of the family. They're amazing family companions," explains Beth O'Connor, who lives with two Leonbergers and is president of the Leonberger Club of America, which has 1,100 members. "They are amazing in terms of their ability to read and understand their people."

Dark facemasks are a main characteristic of the dogs which grow to 28 to 31 1/2 in. tall at the withers. The breed has a double coat, and the male has a lion-like mane of hair on his neck and chest. They vary in color from "lion-yellow" to red-brown with black tips on their coats and a little white hair on the chest and toes. Despite their size (150 lbs. or more) they run with an even, balanced gait that leaves an impression of effortless power.

The breed goes back to 1846 in Leonberg, Germany. It's suspected that Landseer, Saint Bernard, Pyrenean Mountain and other dog breeds were used to create the breed.

Leonbergers were nearly wiped out in WW

I, but a couple dedicated breeders found 25 of them. The men also started an official breed registry. An American club organized in 1985.

In 1997, three Leonberger dogs played the role of "Buck" in the movie, "The Call of the Wild: Dog of the Yukon."

"I saw a photo of a Leonberger in a book, and I thought it was the most beautiful dog I've ever seen," O'Connor says. Without any background for buying a purebred dog, she drove 6 hours to meet with a breeder in Los Angeles for a 3-hour interview. Getting to know a breeder is key, O'Connor says, noting she has developed lifelong friendships with the breeders of her dogs – and with other members of the club.

Puppies from good breeders range from \$1,800 to \$2,500, and it's important to take time to learn if the breed is right for you, O'Connor emphasizes. The Leonberger Club requires breeders to conduct several tests before selling puppies – including those that check the hips, eyes, thyroid and for a rare neurological disorder. Life expectancy for Leos is 8 to 10 years. Leos that reach 12 years are affectionately given the Grey Muzzle award.



Leonberger dogs vary in color from "lion-yellow" to red-brown and have dark faces. Males have a lion-like mane of hair on the neck and chest.

In addition to their friendly, loyal nature, Leos do well in obedience and agility trials, water rescue, draft work and therapy work. They make good watchdogs and bark when someone knocks on a door, for example. But they are not aggressive by nature.

They definitely require training and attention, and some have higher energy levels than others, O'Connor says. She adds that the breed seems to attract a certain kind of people.

"I've met some of the most giving people

all over the country and internationally who own Leos," she says. "It's about the joy of having a dog in your life that is part of your family."

She recommends people interested in the breed contact the organization for more information and to find respected breeders.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Leonberger Club of America, P.O. Box 203, Pinehurst, Mass. 01866 (ph 916 743-4501; info@leonbergerclubofamerica.com; www.leonbergerclubofamerica.com).

Bear Dogs Keep Predators At Bay

When Karen Zimmerman and her family moved to northeast Washington State, they shared their new home with bears, cougars and coyotes. A niece and her family, two daughters and their families, and Zimmerman and her husband moved into four separate houses on 210 acres in a remote valley surrounded by national forest. Zimmerman was concerned about potential problems with area predators.

"We learned that the National Park Service uses Karelian bear dogs as protection," says Zimmerman. "We bought two females and decided to start breeding them to provide other families with that same protection."

Karelians were bred for hunting bear in their native Finland. "When we moved here, we used to see bear, cougar and coyote tracks everywhere in the valley," recalls Zimmerman. "Now we never see tracks, and we've trained the kids to never go anywhere without having one of our dogs with them."

Zimmerman sells her puppies for home and family protection, as well as to ranchers who want to protect livestock. Zimmerman says one of her customers trained his Karelian to be a bird dog. An experienced trainer, he said the Karelian was the most amazing dog he had ever seen.

"Many of them are used in search and rescue," she says. "They are great at that, too."

She describes Karelians as being intensely loyal, protective and territorial. They also are very energetic and need daily exercise or they will get bored.

Zimmerman says the dogs need room to roam and are predisposed to range around the local territory, not simply stay by buildings. As a result, predators learn to stay away.

"In the spring, bears leaving their dens will sometimes come into the valley," says Zimmerman. "The dogs will tree them and bark to let us know. Once a person arrives, the dogs are easy to take away so the bear can leave."

She notes that the dogs should be placed with new owners as young as possible. She likes to have her puppies in their new home within 6 to 8 weeks of birth.

"Around 6 weeks, they start to bond with the people around them," explains Zimmerman. "It's also important to start training them young. We knew nothing about the breed when we got our first two and didn't



Karelian bear dogs range from 19 to 23 in. high and weigh 44 to 50 lbs. They have distinctive black and white markings.

jump on training as soon as we should have."

She says the dogs are naturally very independent minded and can be aggressive and headstrong. Zimmerman says owners need to be loving but in control, and the dogs need to be trained to be submissive.

"We have chickens and horses, and area ranchers bring cows to graze on the national forestland," says Zimmerman. "The dogs are fine with them and children as well, especially when introduced as puppies. They can be aggressive to other dogs that come into their area."

Karelians are a compact breed, ranging from 19 to 23 in. in height and 44 to 50 lbs. in weight. They have distinct black and white markings.

Zimmerman keeps four females and a male, breeding two females every 6 months. Puppies are priced at \$600 for those from two females registered through the Universal Kennel Club. Puppies from the two females registered with the American Kennel Club are priced at \$700.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Aspen Valley Karelian Bear Dogs, P.O. Box 574, Colville, Wash. 99114 (ph 509-684-8031; avbeardog@hotmail.com; www.avbeardog.com).

Livestock Guardian Dogs From The "Old Country"

"Dear Mr. Wolf: Meet Your Match".

We spotted that headline in an ad in a recent issue of Range magazine. The advertiser: Cinco Deseos Ranch of Winnemucca, Nevada, which says it offers "serious livestock protection for serious predator problems".

Spanish Mastiffs

Spanish Mastiffs originated in Spain. Males range up to 38 in. tall and weigh up to 260 lbs.; females range up to 35 in. tall and



weigh up to 220 lbs. They have a noble bearing and detachment, and are extremely courageous, regal, and alert. They are not overly affectionate, have a calm bearing, are never hyper, and are very protective and suspicious of strangers. They're friendly and accepting only after introduced, although some never let their guard down. They have a loud, low, rumbling roar of a bark. Loose skin hangs in folds from the head and neck. Prices range from \$800 to \$1,500.



Turkish Boz

The Turkish Boz originated in the Urfa mountains region of Turkey. Males are 32 to 38 in. tall and average 140 to 240 lbs.;

females are 29 to 33 in. tall and average 115 to 150 lbs. The Turkish Boz excels in defense against large predators such as wolves, mountain lions and bears. They're extremely devoted to their owner and make superior family and home protection dogs. In Turkey they're heavily used to guard sheep.

Males sell for \$1,200 to \$1,700; females for \$1,300 to \$2,500. Breeder's pick of litter pup (male or female) sells for \$2,700.

Pyrenean Mastiff

Pyrenean Mastiffs originated in Spain and weigh 130 to 180 lbs. although some males can reach 200 lbs. Unlike most large guard



dogs, which can be aloof, the Pyrenean Mastiff has an extremely affectionate, loving, people-oriented temperament making him an ideal choice for the small, family-run hobby farm or ranch as a combination livestock guardian and family companion. A jovial breed, very protective of its stock, property and family, yet very aggressive when threatened. Suspicious of strangers until introduced.

Males and females sell for \$800 to \$1,200. Breeder's pick of litter pup (male or female) sells for \$1,500.

The ranch also sells several lower-priced Livestock Guard Dog crosses including Turkish Kangals crossed with Anatolian/Maremma and Great Pyrenees crossed with Great Pyrenees/Polish Tatra.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Brenda M. Negri, Cinco Deseos Ranch, Winnemucca, Nevada (ph 775 931-0038 or 775 623-6292; lgdnevada@gmail.com; www.lgdnevada.com).