

Akita

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July 6, 2011 at 9:15am.

It really has been a long trek with me and the Akita, as for a long time they were on my secret list of breeds I could not stand. My very first childhood dog was part Akita, and while I loved him dearly his aggression was just a trauma to me....not merely that he had it, but HOW, which I would come to know to be rather Akita specific.

I then went through an extended history of Akitas aggressing on my own dogs and on those of my comrades, and just for my own sensibility could not exactly connect with a dog who was so NOT a GSD. For a working dog, I would like to see something more trainable and handler thirsty, thank you very much, and so for the longest time while those who I would review the breed for never would have guessed my personal feelings, there was no love lost between me and the Akita.

He was a pretty face but a marauder, and stacked up against other breeds not worth much to me personally. Didn't like him. Didn't like him one bit. I didn't even admire anyone who liked him....I thought they were being sucked in by an impressive form and were just clueless to how dogs COULD be. That would change in, of all things, a shelter setting when I was asked to test out dominant dogs. And people were not too keen to mess with this staunch figure who did not bark, did not growl, did not flinch, but just in his stance lent the firm suggestion that he was packing heat and was not afraid to use it, but would not let you know when.

I am also not only a wildlife rehabber but more to the point a stallion manager, and what I found was an animal strikingly reminiscent of the latter. Not the jiggy, over thirsty stallions, but the crested ones who were vats of confidence, the ones who would try to fake you out. And in time, we came to an understanding, the Akita and me, and he won my begrudging admiration. For in such a dank, depressing dungeon of chaos, with nothing left to hold onto, he would still stand proud. A sense of self and self-assurance. Science says animals do not have that, but they would do well to pull their faces out of books and stats that belonged only to this dog. This defiantly

proud animal, stuck in domesticity but never quite electing to bow. Now before I say a word more, to underscore this CLEARLY. They are adorable as puppies, they are stunning adults, and they are impressiveness on a leash....massive ego dogs. And massively over bred, milled to the gills. You will see many variations in Akita temperament. I have found some softer, I have found some affably outgoing, even some submissive. The Akita being spoken of here is what breeders go for, judges look for, and what breed fanatics revere most. THIS is the Akita in America when he is what his greatest supporters would expect him to be. Some would call the Akita dominant. To me, more aptly put, he is the personification of ALPHA. He is confident, contained and never out-stated. Drama and the Akita are often many miles removed. He is mysterious at times and can be hard to read. He does everything with self-assurance he doesn't rush in - he just responds. He is often intolerant of stranger dogs in his backdrop. I have more than a few times seen an Akita not show aggressive response until within strike range, and then it comes fast and hard. For he is not aggressive in a traditional sense - he is resolved, absolute, intent. He can, more than most, be intolerant of those messing around with his possession or his own sense of order. He is, infamously, intolerant of heavy or harsh handling, or being treated disrespectfully. This is the romantic Akita, but it also can be the actual Akita. This is a niche breed who should be SO less popular than he is. Those who love him do so profoundly.

A dog from quite a different culture, he is not a fawning or highly emotive dog, but he is intensely loyal to his family. He would defend them to the death, considers them his own, wants to be near them, and separates from them poorly. Re-homed as adults, Akitas can take a while to settle in.....this is a dog of discretion and they do not open their hearts carelessly. Once embraced by an Akita, however, he is yours for life. And in death as well, much as Akita legend would show.

To understand the Akita, cultural understanding is important, as is to function. There are many hats this breed has worn in his history, but I think the one that most defines him is a hunter of large game, which he pursued not only with determination, but also held at bay until the hunter could arrive. Now when it is a bear being held, should the dog back down he would likely get killed, but getting too riled up, also, would have escalated the situation and perhaps prompted the bear to strike. So in the Akita character, we do see a dog with lots of determination, an

absoluteness of holding his ground and tremendous rates of confidence and self-control. Many who are drawn to this breed find something reminiscent of the wolf in him and something primal....a "savage beauty." They also are able to enjoy some marvelous qualities the Akita can bring. One is that for all his size, he is not bursting with energy, has a marvelous in-home energy, is very tidy, and can be rather good at not being constantly underfoot. He is, in short, a superior house companion. He also has a vibrant, charming demeanor and an enthusiasm for life that brightens his personality tremendously, and is extraordinarily devoted to his people and his life. He is a protector and a guard dog who takes the matter of turf very seriously....an excellent breed for a sense of inner security....and yet is not a noisy animal. When an Akita barks, LOOK, for infrequently is he a random barker...he is not one to sweat the little things in life. Many of the other breeds considered for security and protection are considerably more reactive than this dog. These are qualities that partner well with our modern lives.

As well, beauty is as beauty does, and this is an enormously intelligent breed and a true thinker. You may not always know his thoughts, but that he is always assessing and always aware is vividly clear. A very wise animal, he seldom does anything stupid and has a very knowing presence. It IS that presence that draws people. There is much Akita brings to the plate. Presence personified, he is one of the most loyal of all breeds, offers a distinct brightness and he is amazingly responsible. He has a great energy, is easy to live with and offers a tremendous sense of security and pride in ownership.

I am sure Taz is destined to agree, however, that this is NOT the dog for an inexperienced owner. Akitas need a great deal of socialization. They need an owner who will ensure their world to not become too "small"...getting out with them frequently, having them experience many different situations, so that they will not define their territory lines too profoundly. And they need the experience of someone who knows how to be a calm, strong and effective leader. This breed is a total Goldilocks. If you are too soft with him he may well not respect you....and this is a dog who can be naturally driven, to function, to enforce his wont....and yet at the same time if you are too stern with him, he will not tolerate that, even if you are his beloved. There are very few breeds who are as infamous to their responses for overbearing handling....this IS a dog who will put you on the floor....but not having

control of a dog so determined is an equally bad idea. He already loves you....now he wants to be sure you know what you are doing, that you do it well, and that you treat him with respect. A dog of very strong will and at times an achingly independent mind....far less a follower than many....the Akita is a training challenge where fairness, consistency and self-assurance are paramount. Those who connect with this breed can manage OB titles with him and even can turn him into a hunting dog and retriever. They also can do well in therapy work.

A good mentor is essential, as well as is a devotion to laying a good foundation down, always having control of your dog, and being someone worth listening to. The single greatest piece of sage Akita advice I can give is that an Akita WILL decide what is acceptable and what is not. If that sentence made you nervous, this breed may well be too much for you.