

The Temperament Test

We begin making notes of each puppy from the time they're born to get an early indication of their individual traits which can provide clues to subsequent development. Around five weeks of age we begin looking at sociability, emotionality, problem solving ability, group dynamics, motor abilities and more. We typically find that temperament testing gives confirmation of the knowledge we have already gained about each puppy. And, although we're proponents of temperament testing, we realize it is not intended to predict future performance. Rather, it is used to evaluate a puppy's temperament at the time of testing, and helps to evaluate their basic personality. We use the testing to isolate and quantify a puppy's various strengths and weaknesses at the time of testing. When properly structured, the tests can provide some predictive clues of each dog's personality, sociability, and potential trainability. The testing helps to determine which puppies have the most suitable personalities for their future roles and family settings.

The tests we use consist of a series of exercises that give information as to a puppy's tendencies. The best time to do the testing is at 49 days old. At this age, the puppy's brain waves are the same as an adult dog, except for experiences. Not all puppies will test the same, and the differences will assist in placing the puppy in the most appropriate environment.

The test is performed by an objective person that is experienced with dogs and knows the Labrador breed. The components of the test include social attraction, following, restraint, social dominance, elevation dominance, retrieving, touch sensitivity, sound sensitivity, sight sensitivity, stability and structure. There are additional tests utilized for assistance dog candidates, such as a terrain test to ascertain the pup's willingness to walk across various textures, or testing responses to environmental stimuli. We also make note of problem solving abilities, energy level, natural inclination, curiosity, and other traits which help us make a great fit for the puppy into their new family.

Testing

In a strange area for the pup, and with a helper to do some of the more complex tests for me (plus charts and markers). We now begin -- never more than 4 pups at a time. We take the first pup and place him on his back with my hand on his chest, then proceed to count to ten slowly. If I reach ten before he starts to fight to get up, he fell asleep!! Most pups will start to struggle between 3 and 5 and that's a good **MEDIUM**. Pups that hold still past 5 will be very submissive -- **SOFT**. Pups that start to struggle as soon as they hit the ground will end up as **HARD** adults.

In order to determine more information about their personalities, we have devised several tests that give us information about specific area of their temperament...they will be explained individually:

Human interaction: The helper picks up a pup (not affectionately -- just normally) and walks away to a secluded area (about 20 ft), and places the pup on the ground (no talking), and then walks away about 10 ft. We want to see if:

- a) The puppy follows immediately, then he will be a very willing worker!
- b) The pup stays to check things out -- then realizing he is alone, he runs up to the helper, then he will be very easy to socialize and has a human dependence.
- c) The pup looks, sees the helper leave, and acts like "the heck with you" and proceeds to check out the area he is in, this shows that he is CONFIDENT and SELF-INDULGENT; he will be able to take care of himself without too much need for human companionship

Submission/Dominance: The helper now kneels down on the ground, claps his hands, and calls "puppy, puppy..."

- a) If the pup pays attention quickly-- sees the helper and runs up happily, then he is a CONFIDENT, SOCIABLE, PERFECT DOG!
- b) If the pup hears, sees the helper, thinks about it, and then slowly "slinks" toward her, then he is a submissive, obedient pup, but lacks the solid "hello world" attitude a shepherd should have.
- c) If the pup hears and sees but ignores the call, he is a DOMINANT, "chip on the shoulder, I don't need you, I've got better things to do" type pup that will be very difficult to train!

Sociability: The tester now walks up to the pup, kneels and pets the pup, talking softly, to watch the reaction

- a) If the pup jumps all over the helper, licking and playing, then he is happy to accept human companionship and will thrive on praise!
- b) If the pup prefers to chew on the helper's hands, clothes, feet, or whatever, then he is a dominant pup and is trying to take control of the situation. This pup will be harder to train!
- c) If the pup ignores the human gesture of affection and prefers to sniff the ground or run off and play, then he is very dominant (HARD) and will not accept authority well.

Elevation/Forgiveness: The helper now stands up, picks up the pup (with one hand on either side of the belly, so all four feet are fully off the ground.) It should look like the pup is "standing on air." The helper holds this position to the count of 5 and then places the pup on the ground by her feet and walks away slowly, encouraging the pup to follow:

- a. If the pup holds very still while held up in the air and seems relaxed, then follows immediately when placed on the ground, then he will grow into a good loving SUBMISSIVE adult that you can make a mistake with when training, and he'll bounce right back! This dog will be very easy to work with!
- b. If the pup struggles when held up, yet still is willing to follow the helper after being placed on the ground, then he will be a bit more dominant but easy to work with. This type of pup is usually great for Schutzhund training—he's not happy about being in a situation he can't control, but he's willing to deal with it!

- c. The pup that struggles, bites and fights while he's held up in the air is either scared to death or very **HARD** and **DOMINANT**. Watch carefully when he is placed on the ground; if he recovers quickly and tries to attack the helper's feet, he's a super **HARD** Dog! If he cowers and refuses to make friends, he's scared and has no confidence.

Retrieve drive: The helper now holds the pup right next to her and shows it the "toy." We usually use a crumpled cigarette pack or small chew toy. The tester gets the pup's attention, then throws the toy a few feet in front of her (not too far—2-3 feet is perfect).

- a. If the pup runs out, grabs the toy and comes back when called—he's terrific! The pup will be a snap to train and will work his heart out for you—he's the type of dog that you "show" and he does!
- b. If the pup runs up and grabs the paper and drops it—but he's still willing to return then you may have problems with the retrieving for schutzhund, but he will be a very willing worker and although you might have to show him twice, he will always **TRY** to please you!
- c. The pup that runs up, grabs the toy, looks back at you, and then runs off to play is a very **INDEPENDENT** pup that doesn't need anyone bossing him around! He thinks this world is here to serve him! He's going to grow up doing his own thing, and if you try severe training methods on him, he will "rebel" and balk every step of the way!

* Please note: There's no such thing as "good" or "bad" temperament in these tests—we are only concerned with which dog is **RIGHT** or **WRONG** for **your** **SPECIFIC** **NEEDS**.

Although Temperament Testing can help us a great deal in determining each **INDIVIDUAL** puppy's future potential, it is also **VERY IMPORTANT** to understand each puppy's dominant and recessive genes, so we can continue to **IMPROVE** our stock! Without a basic understanding of the most critical genetic factors in our breed, we will end up creating a lot of problems for ourselves as well as everyone else!