

# **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE!**

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You've done your homework. You took the online 'tests' to match your personality and lifestyle to a breed. You've read all you can find, and called every breed organization, breeder and owner you can unearth. You have had confirmed your suspicion that the Australian Shepherd is as near a perfect dog as the Great Spirit and man could have created. Of course, we devotees feel that way, but before it is too late, there is another side to the 'perfect' breed. This side is seldom presented in glossy ads or breeder packets, but needs to be said anyhow...before it is too late.

## **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE FOR ITS LOOKS**

Striking and unusual colors and markings are usually what attracts the average person to the Aussie. Looks, however, are only a small part of living with an Aussie. The true beauty of the Australian Shepherd shines outward from his character. An Aussie can be a strong guardian of your home and a dog that is not overtly social with people outside of your immediate family...is this something you will enjoy for the 14+ years of an Aussie's life? Buy an Aussie because you have researched the breed's temperament and personality, and think it is something that you could enjoy living with for a long time.

## **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU LACK TIME TO SPEND WITH HIM**

Aussies are like a very intelligent child. If you do not keep them occupied ("give them a job") they *will* find a job to do. What's the problem with that, you might ask? You probably won't like the job they choose. It could consist of re-doing your drip system and/or excavating to China.

Aussies need human guidance on a regular basis in order to become a good companion dog or ranch hand. Aussies can fit in city homes, suburban homes, or country/farm homes, but in all cases need responsible owners that are willing to spend time and energy fulfilling the breed's high mental and physical activity needs. No matter what the lifestyle, be it an urban pet or a ranch dog, Aussies need to be properly prepared for how they are expected to act. They cannot be left to do this on their own. Socialization and training are a must if you wish to have a dog that can manage well in various situations, such as meeting new people, travelling, interacting with other dogs, and being able to adapt to the many changes that occur on a regular basis in normal human life.

Socialization requires thoughtful exposures to many different environments so that the dog will become comfortable anywhere he goes. Aussies that have not been adequately socialized are often fearful in new situations, and fearful dogs are dangerous dogs. Do not skimp on the socialization.

Training is also a necessity if you wish to have a long and happy relationship with your Aussie. Your darling, bouncing Australian Shepherd puppy will grow to be a very powerful adult. Even 35# Australian Shepherds can easily take a large man off their feet

in a lunge on a leash. House manners and basic obedience are the bare minimum this breed needs. Basic obedience includes a SOLID recall, sit, down, stay and walking nicely on a leash. House manners include not only toilet training but also rules regarding furniture, forbidden areas, counter surfing, respect for other household creatures, walking rather than racing, begging at the table, stealing food from kids, greeting guests, resting quietly in a crate, grooming routines, when to bark and when not to. If you have acquired an Aussie as a working dog, remember that although he comes with the basic instinct to do his job, he will not know what that job is unless he is properly directed and trained. You cannot expect any working dog to magically become a ranch hand unless you have spent the time and effort to guide him into his role. If you do not train him, he will probably become, at best, "just another yard dog", or at worst, a real nuisance.

An enormous reason to thoughtfully prepare your dog for how you wish him to act is his strong guardian instinct. Left unguided, this instinct can lead your Aussie to behave in ways that can get him (and you) in trouble.

#### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU ARE NOT A LEADER**

Dogs do not view life as a democracy. Dog packs have clear rules, hierarchies and consequences. Pack leaders lead by posture, predictability, eye contact, and many other subtleties and nuances. Aussies are often forceful personalities that, in the absence of a strong leader, will not hesitate to step into that role. Establishing and maintaining leadership is a lifetime job that you must take seriously to maintain order in your household with an Aussie as a family member. In addition, your Aussie needs you as a strong leader to help him be relaxed and confident. Being a leader of a human household is a difficult job for an animal! Dogs that do not have clear leaders are often stressed and reactive.

#### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU ARE A 'NEAT FREAK'**

Australian Shepherd are robust, athletic dogs. They get dirty. They don't know that you just mopped the floor or that the dead groundhog they just rolled in makes your house reek to high heaven. If you get stressed out if your house is less than totally sanitary, please reconsider getting a dog.

Australian Shepherds shed. They are in the mid-range of the shedding scale, less than a German Shepherd or Husky but more than a Bichon. They usually "blow their coat" about twice a year, and shed undercoat continually. Their type of coat is easily managed by a good brushing twice a week or so, but you will still find lots of hair on your furniture, car upholstery, clothing and floor no matter how often you groom them.

#### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU CAN'T PROVIDE OUTDOOR EXERCISE**

Australian Shepherd, like many dogs, enjoy the exhilaration of outdoor exercise. This can be walks, jogging, swimming, chasing balls, bike jogging. There is no one formula for how much or how often, but setting aside a daily time will keep you both fitter, build more 'quality time' into your relationship, and reduce boredom related misbehavior. If you have physical limitations, carting, weight pulling, bike jogging etc can suit you both. *Keep in mind that forced exercise such as jogging and biking should only be started after the dog's growth plates have closed, usually at around 1 year of age. Prior to that, forced exercise can lead to permanent damage to bones, ligaments, tendons and muscles.*

### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO FEED AND CARE FOR ONE**

First some simple premises. Dogs eat. Dogs need both preventive vet care and care for disease or accident. Medium to large dogs cost more in anesthesia, boarding, grooming, heartworm meds, neutering. Call the vet practice you think you will be using and prepare a budget. Factor in a 'fudge' factor for accidents or illnesses that fall outside preventive care and neutering. A figure of \$100 per month is not unreasonable. If this is going to strain the budget this is not the time for a dog in your life. Being realistic about this point can be very difficult-but being unable to care for a dog you love is painful too.

### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE FOR A FIERCE PROTECTION DOG**

Most well bred, properly socialized Australian Shepherd will guard their territory and protect their pack (if they feel they are part of a pack.) Managing this trait requires a skilled handler, one who can anticipate what a dog views as a threat. It can be legally problematic if you own a dog that you have intentionally trained as a protection dog. Most Aussies provide a great deterrent to potential thieves or attackers simply by alarm barking in the home or yard, and there is no need to teach them to make the threat "for real." Encouraging cross or suspicious behavior in your Aussie can result in terrible accidents with regular visitors to your home.

### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE IF YOU JUST WANT A NON-AGGRESSIVE 'DETERRENT'**

The Australian Shepherd standard describes the dog as having 'strong guardian instinct.' You can rightfully expect this from even the most peaceable dog. Dogs with less socialization or weaker characters may also bite if afraid, threatened or demanded of. It is a dead wrong assumption to believe an Aussie will never bite because he is 'laid back' or 'so friendly.' If your couch potato mistakenly thinks your neighbor's son is assaulting your son with a baseball bat, or you and your spouse are fighting rather than engaging in horseplay, there may be some 'intervention.' Be aware and PREPARED.

### **DON'T BUY AN AUSSIE AS AN 'INVESTMENT'**

Did you know that the IRS's preferred position on dog breeding is that it is a hobby? If breeding dogs was such a lucrative, money making opportunity why are they not cashing in on it? Respected dog breeders who have actually kept books for their kennel mostly show losses annually. This is because as demonstrated above, \$100 a month per dog is not an unrealistic budget figure. To that figure you must add health certifications, show and advanced training expenses, traveling to these events, advertising, club dues and donations, and sometimes (as often as half the time) a dog you raised for 2 yrs at minimum \$100 per month fails to make the grade as a quality breeding dog. Then you either have a pet-or must place this one for little or no compensation.

This is just the beginning. The average litter size is about 7. Price tail docking and dew claw removal, or prepare yourself to do it on your own. Can you do your own vaccines and worming or will that be another vet bill? What do c-sections cost in your area? Would you know if your bitch needs one? Do you have experience hand raising orphaned or abandoned pups? Will your employer allow you time off for whelping-or 3 weeks minimum for hand rearing (feeding every 2-3 hours around the clock?) Do you

know that even established breeders often have several left over pups-due to last minute cancellations, wrong sex, 12 born in the litter...? Can you raise and train as your own these 'left overs' until good homes are found? (Also apply the \$100 per month per dog figure to leftovers. They eat too.) If your puppies are dumped by the buyer (who probably didn't read or believe this missive) can you retrieve them from rescue or a shelter (usually more fees) and continue your responsibility to them? Most club codes of ethics REQUIRE you do this.

### **DON'T BUY an Aussie...**

- \*if your life and available time is better suited to a goldfish
- \*if your life is unstable in job or location
- \*if your children's activities and demands will put the dog's on 'hold'
- \*if no one is home 10-14 hrs a day, and the remaining time overbooked.
- \*as your first dog
- \*to have a different dog, lawn ornament or trophy of success
- \*if you find it hard to make commitments in your life
- \*because a spouse is pressuring you for a dog you will end up being primary care taker for.
- \*for the kids as a 'playmate.'

If the plain talk about the breed hasn't discouraged you, you are likely to embark on a most intense, rewarding relationship with a remarkable breed. The information provided here is the flip side of what living with an intelligent, demanding, enthusiastic dog can be like. As you set out to find your perfect Australian Shepherd, expect to be quizzed by responsible breeders about some of these issues. You will also be better prepared to notice warning flags with some litters/breeders. After reading this, you will be better prepared to represent yourself, your needs, your situation and a breeder can better select a puppy for you-guaranteeing success for all. If after reading this you still long for your own wonderful, comical Aussie companion...welcome to the fraternity!