

“DON’T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND!”

This article has been adapted from “Don’t Buy a Bouvier!” by Pam Green (c.1992) (This article, written many years ago, has become a classic in Bouvier circles. It has been reprinted many times by clubs to use for the education of prospective Bouvier owners. She gives her permission freely to all who wish to reprint and distribute it in hopes of saving innocent dogs from neglect and abandonment by those who should never have acquired them in the first place.)

Interested in buying a Newf? You must be or you wouldn't be reading this. You've already heard how marvelous Newfies are. Well, I think you should also hear, before it's too late, that NEWFOUNDLANDS ARE NOT THE PERFECT BREED FOR EVERYONE. As a breed, they have a few characteristics that some people find charming, but that some people find mildly unpleasant, and some people find downright intolerable.

There are different breeds for different needs.

There are over 400 breeds of dogs in the world. Maybe you'd be better off with some other breed. Maybe you'd be better off with a cat. Maybe you'd be better off with goldfish, a parakeet, a hamster, or some house-plants.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU ARE ATTRACTED TO THE BREED CHIEFLY BY ITS APPEARANCE

The appearance of the Newfoundlands you have seen in the show ring is the product of many hours of bathing and grooming. This carefully constructed beauty is fleeting: a few minutes of freedom, romping through the fields or strolling in the rain, restores the natural look. The natural look of the Newfie is that of a large, shaggy farm dog, usually with some dirt and weeds clinging to his tousled coat. The true beauty of the Newf lies in his character, not in his appearance. Some of the long-coated and most of the short-coated breeds' appearances are less dependent on grooming than is that of the Newfie. (See also the section on grooming below.)

DON'T BUY A NEWF IF YOU ARE UNWILLING TO SHARE YOUR HOUSE AND YOUR LIFE WITH YOUR DOG

Newfies were bred to share in the work of the family (fishing, pulling carts, etc.) and to spend most of their waking hours working with the family. They thrive on companionship and they want to be wherever you are. They are happiest living with you in your house and going with you when you go out. While they usually tolerate being left at home by themselves (preferably with a dog-door giving access to the fenced yard), they should not be relegated to the backyard or kennel. A puppy exiled from the house is likely to grow up to be unsociable, unruly, and unhappy. He may well develop pastimes, such as digging or barking, that will displease you and/or your neighbors. An adult so exiled will be miserable too. If you don't strongly prefer to have your dog's companionship as much as possible, enjoying having him sleep in your bedroom at night and sharing many of your activities by day, you should choose a breed less oriented to human companionship. Likewise if your job or other obligations prevent you from spending much time with your dog. No dog is really happy without companionship, but the pack hounds for example, are more tolerant of being kenneled or yarded so long as it is in groups of 2 or more. A better choice would be a cat, as they are solitary by nature.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU DON'T INTEND TO EDUCATE (TRAIN) YOUR DOG

Basic obedience and household rules training is NOT optional for the Newf. As an absolute minimum, you must teach him to reliably respond to commands to come, to lie down, to stay, and to walk at your side, on or off leash and regardless of temptations. You must also teach him to respect your household rules: e.g. is he allowed to get on the furniture? is he allowed to beg at the table? What you allow or forbid is unimportant, but it is **critical** that you, not the dog, make these choices and that you enforce your rules consistently. You must

commit yourself to attending an 8 to 10 week series of weekly lessons at a local obedience club or with a professional trainer, and to doing one or two short (5 to 20 minutes) homework sessions per day. As commands are learned, they must be integrated into your daily life by being used whenever appropriate, and enforced consistently. Young Newfie puppies are relatively easy to train: they are eager to please, intelligent, and calm-natured, with a relatively good attention span. Once a Newfie has learned something, he tends to retain it well. Your cute, sweet little Newf puppy will grow up to be a large, powerful dog. If he has grown up respecting you and your rules, then all his physical and mental strength will work for you. But if he has grown up without rules and guidance from you, surely he will make his own rules, and his physical and mental powers will often act in opposition to your needs and desires. For example: he may tow you down the street as if competing in a sled-dog race; he may grab food off the table; he may forbid your guests entry to "his" home.

This training cannot be delegated to someone else, e.g. by sending the dog away to "boarding school," because the relationship of respect and obedience is personal between the dog and the individual who does the training. While you definitely many want the help of an experienced trainer to teach you how to train your dog, you yourself must actually train your Newf. As each lesson is well learned, then the rest of the household (except young children) must also work with the dog, insisting he obey them as well.

Many of the Newfs that are rescued from pounds and shelters show clearly that they have received little or no basic training, neither in obedience nor in household deportment; yet these same dogs respond well to such training by the rescuer or the adopter. It seems likely that a failure to train the dog is a significant cause of Newf abandonment.

If you don't intend to educate your dog, preferably during puppyhood, you would be better off with a breed that is both small and socially submissive.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU LACK LEADERSHIP (SELF-ASSERTIVE) PERSONALITY

Dogs do not believe in social equality. They live in a social hierarchy led by a pack-leader (alpha). The alpha dog is generally benevolent, affectionate, and non-bullying towards his subordinates; but there is never any doubt in his mind or in theirs that the alpha is the boss and makes the rules. Whatever the breed, if you do not assume the leadership, the dog will do so sooner or later, and with more or less unpleasant consequences for the abdicating owner. Like the untrained dog, the pack-leader dog makes his own rules and enforces them against other members of the household by means of a dominant physical posture and a hard-eyed stare, followed by a snarl, then a knockdown blow or a bite. Breeds differ in tendencies towards social dominance; and individuals within a breed differ considerably. You do not have to have the personality or mannerisms of a Marine boot camp sergeant, but you do have to have the calm, quiet self-assurance and self-assertion of the successful parent ("Because I'm your mother, that's why") or successful grade-school teacher. If you think you might have difficulty asserting yourself calmly and confidently to exercise leadership, then choose a breed known for its socially subordinate disposition, such as a Golden Retriever or a Shetland Sheepdog, **and** be sure to ask the breeder to select one of the more submissive pups in the litter for you. If the whole idea of "being the boss" frightens or repels you, don't get a dog at all. Cats don't expect leadership. A gerbil or hamster or fish doesn't need leadership or household rules.

Leadership and training are inextricably intertwined: leadership personality enables you to train your dog, and being trained by you reinforces your dog's perception of you as the alpha.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU DON'T VALUE LAID-BACK COMPANIONSHIP AND CALM AFFECTION

A Newf becomes deeply attached and devoted to his own family, but he doesn't "wear his heart on his sleeve." Some are noticeably reserved, others are more outgoing, but few adults are usually exuberantly demonstrative of their affections. They like to be near you, usually in the same room, preferably on a comfortable pad or cushion in a corner or under a table, just "keeping you company." They enjoy conversation, petting and cuddling when you offer it, but they are moderate and not overbearing in coming to you to demand much attention. They are emotionally sensitive to their favorite people: when you are joyful, proud, angry, or grief-stricken, your Newf will immediately perceive it and will believe himself to be the cause. The relationship can be one of great

mellowness, depth, and subtlety; it is a relation on an adult-to-adult level, although certainly not one devoid of playfulness. As puppies, of course, they will be more dependent, more playful, and more demonstrative. In summary, Newfs tend to be sober and thoughtful, rather than giddy clowns or sycophants.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU ARE FASTIDIOUS ABOUT YOUR HOME

The Newfoundland's thick shaggy coat and his love of playing in water and mud combine to make him a highly efficient transporter of dirt into your home, depositing same on your floors and rugs and possibly also on your furniture and clothes. One Newf coming in from a few minutes outdoors on a rainy day can turn an immaculate house into an instant hog wallow. His full chest soaks up water every time he takes a drink, then releases same drippingly across your floor or soppingly into your lap. Newfoundlands are seasonal shedders, and in spring can easily fill a trash bag with balls of hair from a grooming session, or clog a vacuum cleaner if left to shed in the house. I don't mean to imply that you must be a slob or slattern to live happily with a Newf, but you do have to have the attitude that your dog's company means more to you than does neatness, and you do have to be comfortable with a less than immaculate house.

While all dogs, like all children, create a greater or lesser degree of household mess, almost all other breeds of dog are less troublesome than the Newfie in this respect. The Basenji is perhaps the cleanest, due to its cat-like habits; but cats are cleaner yet, and goldfish hardly ever mess up the house.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU FIND DROOL TOTALLY REPELLANT

Most Newfie owners begin with some degree of distaste for drool, but as this is an integral part of the Newf, this dislike usually progresses to some level of nonchalance. A sure sign of a Newf addict is that not only do they not understand other people's squeamishness for this substance, they spend many hours trying to come up with useful purposes for the gallons of drool that can be produced on a regular basis. Some say that the world record "drool toss" from an adult Newf is over 20 feet! This makes your walls and ceilings well within reach of even an average drooler. Newfies drool because of their jaw and mouth structure, which allows them to breath while performing water rescue; this is a quality inherent in the breed.

If you cannot get used to the idea of drool in your house, then try one of the many breeds of dogs that do not drool. Newfs are definitely not in this category. Although I have heard of cats who drool, the quantity is not remotely comparable, and hamsters don't drool at all.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU DISLIKE DOING REGULAR GROOMING

The thick shaggy Newfoundland coat demands regular grooming, not merely to look tolerably nice, but also to preserve the health of skin underneath and to detect and remove foxtails, ticks, and other dangerous invaders. For "pet" grooming, you should expect to spend 10-15 minutes a day (e.g. while listening to music or watching television) on alternate days or half an hour twice a week. Of course any time your Newf gets into cockleburrs, filigree, or other coat-adhering vegetation, you are likely to be in for an hour or more of remedial work. During oxtail season, (western US), you must inspect feet and other vulnerable areas daily. In Lyme disease areas during tick season, you will need to inspect for ticks daily. "Pet" grooming does not require a great deal of skill, but does require time and regularity. "Show" grooming requires a great deal of skill and considerably more time and effort or expensive professional grooming.

Almost every Newfie that is rescued out of a pound or shelter shows the effects of many months of no grooming, resulting in massive matting and horrendous filthiness, sometimes with urine and feces cemented into the rear portions of the coat. It appears that unwillingness to keep up with coat care is a primary cause of abandonment.

Many other breeds of dog require less grooming; short coated breeds require very little.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU DISLIKE DAILY EXERCISE

Newfs need exercise to maintain the health of heart and lungs, and to maintain muscle tone. Because of his mellow, laid-back, often lazy, disposition, your Newfie will not give himself enough exercise unless you accompany him or play with him. An adult Newf should have a morning outing of a mile or more, as you walk briskly beside him, and a similar evening outing. For puppies, shorter and slower walks, several times a day are preferred for exercise and housebreaking.

All dogs need daily exercise of greater or lesser length and vigor. If providing this exercise is beyond you, physically or temperamentally, then choose one of the many small and energetic breeds that can exercise itself within your fenced yard. Most of the Toys and Terriers fit this description, but don't be surprised if a Terrier is inclined to dig in the earth since digging out critters is the job that they were bred to do. Cats can be exercised indoors with mouse-on-a-string toys. Hamsters will exercise themselves on a wire wheel. House plants don't need exercise.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU BELIEVE THAT DOGS SHOULD RUN "FREE"

Whether you live in town or country, no dog can safely be left to run "free" outside your fenced property and without your direct supervision and control. The price of such "freedom" is inevitably injury or death: from dogfights, from automobiles, from the pound or from justifiably irate neighbors. Even though Newfs are home-loving and less inclined to roam than most breeds, an unfenced Newf is destined for disaster. A thoroughly obedience-trained Newfie can enjoy the limited and supervised freedom of off-leash walks with you in appropriately chosen environments.

If you don't want the responsibility of confining and supervising your pet, then no breed of dog is suitable for you. A neutered cat will survive such irresponsibly given "freedom" somewhat longer than a dog, but will eventually come to grief. A better answer for those who crave a "free" pet is to set out feeding stations for some of the indigenous wildlife, such as raccoons, which will visit for handouts and which may eventually tolerate your close observation.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BUY, FEED, AND PROVIDE HEALTHCARE FOR ONE

Newfoundlands are not a cheap breed to buy, as running a careful breeding program with due regard for temperament, trainability, and physical soundness (hips especially) cannot be done cheaply. The time the breeder should put into each puppy's "pre-school" and socialization is also costly. The "bargain" puppy from a "back-yard breeder" who unselectively mates any two Newfs who happen to be of opposite sex may well prove to be extremely costly in terms of bad temperament, bad health, and lack of essential socialization. In contrast, the occasional adult or older pup is available at modest price from a disenchanted owner or from a breeder, shelter, or rescuer to whom the dog was abandoned; most of these "used" Newfs are capable of becoming a marvelous dog for you if you can provide training, leadership, and understanding. Whatever the initial cost of your Newfoundland, the upkeep will not be cheap. Being large dogs, Newfs eat relatively large meals. (Need I add that what goes in one end must eventually come out the other?) Large dogs tend to have larger veterinary bills, as the amount of anesthesia and of most medications is proportional to body weight. Spaying or neutering, which costs more for larger dogs, is an essential expense for virtually all pet Newfs, as it "takes the worry out of being close," prevents serious health problems in later life, and makes the dog a more pleasant companion.

Newfoundlands are subject to two conditions which can be costly to treat: hip dysplasia and bloat. (Your best insurance against dysplasia is to buy only from a litter bred from OFA-certified parents and, if possible, grandparents. Yes, this generally means paying more. While bloat may have a genetic predisposition, there are no predictive tests allowing selective breeding against it. Your best prevention is not to feed your dog too soon before or after strenuous exercise.)

Professional grooming, if you use it, is expensive. An adequate set of grooming tools for use at home adds up to a tidy sum, but once purchased will last many dog-lifetimes.

Finally, the modest fee for participation in a series of basic obedience training classes is an essential

investment in harmonious living with your dog; such fees are the same for all breeds. The modest annual outlays for immunizations and for local licensing are generally the same for all breeds, though some counties have a lower license fee for spayed/neutered dogs.

All dogs, of whatever breed and however cheaply acquired, require significant upkeep costs, and all are subject to highly expensive veterinary emergencies. Likewise all cats.

DON'T BUY A NEWFIE IF YOU WANT THE "LATEST, GREATEST FEROCIOUS KILLER ATTACK DOG"

The Newfoundland's famous disposition as the "Gentle Giant" is not a fable; a Newf with the typical disposition of the breed would prefer to slobber a criminal than attack one. Also because of selective breeding for water rescue, Newfies are "soft-mouthed" dogs.

In contrast to the protection-trained dog, trained to bite on direct command or in reaction to direct physical assault on his master, the "deterrent dog" dissuades the vast majority of aspiring burglars, rapists, and assailants by his presence, his appearance, and his demeanor. Seeing such dog, the potential wrong-doer simply decides to look for a safer victim elsewhere. For this job, all that is needed is a dog that is large and that appears to be well-trained and unafraid. The Newfoundland can serve this role admirably, with the added assets of generally dark color and shaggy "bestial" appearance adding to the impression of formidability and fearsomeness. If the dog has been taught to bark a few times on command, such as "Fang, watch him!" rather than "Fifi, speak for a cookie," this skill can be useful to augment the deterrent effect.

DON'T BUY A NEWFOUNDLAND IF YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO COMMIT YOURSELF FOR THE DOG'S ENTIRE LIFETIME

No dog deserves to be cast out because his owners want to move to a no-pet apartment, or because he is no longer a cute puppy, or didn't grow up to be a beauty contest winner, or because his owners through lack of leadership and training have allowed him to become an unruly juvenile delinquent with a repertoire of undesirable behaviors. The prospects of a responsible and affectionate second home for a "used" dog are never very bright, but they are especially dim for a large, shaggy, poorly mannered dog. A Newf dumped into a pound or shelter has almost no chance of survival – unless he has the great good fortune to be spotted by someone dedicated to Newf Rescue. The prospects for adoption for a youngish, well-trained, and well-groomed Newfie whose owner seeks the assistance of the nearest Newf Club or Rescue group are fairly good, but an older Newf has diminishing prospects. Be sure to contact your local Newf club or Rescue group if you are diagnosed as terminally ill or have other equally valid reasons for seeking an adoptive home. Be sure to contact your local Newf club if you are beginning to have difficulties in training your Newfie, so these can be resolved. Be sure to make arrangements in your will or with your family to ensure continued care or an adoptive home for your Newfoundland if you should pre-decease him.

The life span of a Newfoundland is about 10 years. If that seems too long a time for you to give an unequivocal loyalty to your Newfoundland, then please do not get one! Indeed, as most dogs have a life expectancy that is as long or longer, please do not get any dog.

If all the preceding "bad news" about Newfies hasn't turned you away from the breed, then by all means DO GET A NEWF! They are every bit as wonderful as you have heard!