

The American Foxhound



Description

The American Foxhound is very similar to its British cousin The English Foxhound which dates back to the 13th century. Both look a great deal like a big and tall beagle, though the American Foxhound is a bit taller and thinner. Of course, all the Foxhounds are very closely related and share many common traits. In fact, other than size, they are very similar in appearance and temperament to the somewhat more familiar black, white and tan beagle.

Bred to accompany their masters on the hunt, the American Foxhound is known for its stamina and shrewd nose. They were once used to chase and flush game while their masters remained on horseback ready to dispatch the fleeing beasts. Should they catch it, they very rarely maul their quarry in the course of a hunt, preferring the chase itself.

Their demeanor is cheerful and, as such, they make wonderful family dogs provided they have enough room to run around and expend some of their excess energy. They are also very pack oriented, and will readily call a human family its own and demand daily affection.

The breed standards describe a dog that conveys easy and graceful movement with every step. The head tends to be long and somewhat domed on top. Their large, floppy ears are carried to the side and tend to frame the face unless angry. A Foxhound's tail should be held high and slightly curved upward without actually curling over the top of his or her backside.

The coat is well formed and close but also, thick and coarse, for deep woods action. American Foxhounds with especially soft coats vary from the accepted breed standard and are susceptible to getting bits and bobs stuck in their coat while running through the underbrush.



Foxhounds have very tall legs - taller than any other member of the Foxhound sub-group - and they are able to run through thick woods for hours before tiring. Their stamina is one trait that separates them from their English cousins.

Today, they are widely distributed throughout the Southeastern United States and very often used for several different types of hunting.

History

The Foxhounds were brought to the United States as part of some of the earliest collections hunting dogs in the New World.

Robert Brooke brought the first ones across as early as 1650 - making them among the first domesticated dogs in the Americas. The family line of people and dogs remained unbroken for over 300 years, with the Brooke dogs being a distinctly separate line from others, as recognized in the common studbook.

The American breed of the Foxhound owes its unique head shape and height to the inclusion of some traits from the taller French Hounds that were given to George Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette nearly a century after the first Foxhound arrived.



Foxhounds have been in Virginia for so long, the American Foxhound has actually been named the official state animal.

Temperament

Also like a beagle, these dogs are a bit high strung and are known for their howls and yips. It is a difficult or impossible task to convince these dogs that some people are not to be barked at. When they do set up a howl, it is quite loud, though music to the ears of many who love hounds.

However, they usually don't just sit there and bark (like some hounds), preferring instead to actively seek the affection of others. They crave attention and are very affectionate in the home. They are actually quite good with children and can be trusted with even the smallest young ones.

In fact, American Foxhounds are very social dogs that will fiercely defend their pack, human or not. As such, it can be difficult to retrain a dog to live with a human family if they've spent a lot of time in the company of a dog pack, such as is very commonly found in the case of hunting packs.

Sometimes, Foxhounds are a bit nervous around loud noises and situations where they're overwhelmed by scents and sounds. This can actually send a Foxhound into a frenzy of sorts, often resulting in some destructive behavior.

As such, these hounds have a very highly developed sense of smell (even for a hound), and will follow a scent to the exclusion of all else, including your commands and pleas, especially if it's something good. Even a well-trained Foxhound is not easily called off a scent. It's not that they don't know what you want; it's just that they don't care right now.



When hunting, they are essentially fearless and will do some stupidly brave things if you give them the chance. It is generally not advised to let a Foxhound off the leash unless you're sure there are no roads anywhere nearby and are in a position to get your hound out of trouble if they decide to take on a bear or something equally suicidal.

Owners in town and the country need to be very careful that American Foxhounds don't run off. They're notoriously stupid about traffic, but clever enough to figure out how gates latch; and tall enough to do something about it.

Traits

Life Span:10-13 years although, some have lived to be 15.

Color: Any color is acceptable in this breed, but most are pie-balled with a splotch of black on the back and white legs accented with tan on the trunk.

Hair Length: Medium

Size: Large

Shedding: Moderate Shed

Male Height: 22-25 inches (56-64cm)

Male Weight: 70-75 pounds (30-34kg)

Female Height: 21-24 inches (53-61cm)

Female Weight: 65-70 pounds (29-32kg)

Health

The American Foxhound is an unusually healthy dog. Generally, the breed doesn't show any sign of congenital defect or inherited conditions. It is also usually free of debilitating hip and bone disorders that plague many other large breeds.

However, as American Foxhounds are being bred larger and larger, some hip problems are emerging in the breed. If your hound is very tall, you might want to take extra care to make sure he or she doesn't run too hard.

Training

Just about any type of exercise is suitable for this very active dog, though they are definitely at their best when running through the woods. The American Foxhound's long legs and natural agility allow it to cut through undergrowth faster than you might think possible.



For hounds that don't have regular access to their preferred terrain, regular exercise in a yard or even frequent walks are an absolute must for a hound kept in the relative confinement of living in a house.

Apartment dwellers would do better with another breed of dog, since the Foxhound is prone to very serious bouts of misbehavior when bored. Though not typically a destructive breed, they are sure to wreak havoc on a typical household when left alone too long without exercise.

Many people give them free access to an outdoor pen, but be forewarned: they are well known as escape artists. Their agile minds, "soft mouths" and tall carriage allow them to pick even rather complicated locks.

Exercise

The American Foxhound is a very intelligent breed, though not always responsive, even to the best of training. They are spirited and often described as jovial or happy dogs.

Though not typically the sort of dog that just sets up to barking for hours non-stop, the American Foxhound is known for "giving voice" when conditions warrant it. It can be very difficult to train this very fundamental behavior of hounds out of their usual repertoire.

Some owners, especially those that live in heavily urbanized areas, are able to achieve a certain amount of success with citronella (or any other scent they find offensive) spray collars that give them a little quirt every time they start up with their very distinctive howl and yip.

Their social nature allows you to be in as much of a position of authority as any Foxhound is willing to accept by always making sure you retain your position of dominance in your own family or "little pack."



Many owners find their Foxhounds are very receptive to positive reinforcement. Generally they respond to punishment with what could best be called complete and utter confusion.

Very often, people find training a Foxhound to be a bit like digging a hole in the sand. You keep thinking you're making progress and then they just ignore months or years of training upon a whim.

Indeed, they are a bit difficult to house train. Owners who have even moderate success in this can congratulate themselves on a job well done, since the breed is so resistant to potty-training.

Grooming

The grooming regimen for American Foxhounds is very simple compared to most other breeds. The coat is coarse and smooth with very little extra hair to tangle up or catch things in the woods. So, unless the hound's coat is especially soft, you won't have to worry about picking seeds and leaves out of your companion's fur.

However, a nice, regular brushing is not only good for the skin, but it may also alert you to the presence of fleas before they get out of control. In areas that are prone to wood and deer ticks, regular brushings after a trip to the woods may help prevent the transmission of some serious diseases.



Brushing may be done with either a large dog comb that more closely resembles horse tack or the more traditional fine-toothed comb. The latter is preferable when looking for external parasites such as fleas or ticks.

It is a very worthwhile goal to get your dog to really enjoy the attention of regular brushings. This will help you get the job done with a minimum of fuss at least once per week - twice a week or more is even better. Since they are large enough to give you a very hard time if they don't like a regular brushing, associating grooming with pleasant activities is a must.

While most American Foxhounds get a great deal of exercise in an effort to keep them sane, a careful grooming regimen should include regular checks on their toenails. Most Foxhounds have white claws, making trimming a lot easier. If your dog has black nails, you'll have to be especially careful not to cut below the quick that is visible on white nails.

Pay very close attention to the dewclaws. While the other nails may have a chance to get worn down during exercise (especially if walked on concrete or asphalt), these can grow around and right into the skin if you're not careful.

Another important part of grooming is periodic dental care. There are finger-fitted toothbrushes that are sold with special meat-floured toothpaste that some people have success with when used once a week.

