

# A Novice Looks at Puppy Aptitude Testing

By Melissa Bartlett, originally published in *Pure Bred Dogs, American Kennel Gazette*, March 1979.

*What are the critical periods in a puppy's development? What are the tests which can help determine a puppy's temperament? Read how this review of the literature helped the author in selecting a puppy.*

I learned my first lesson in puppy testing at the tender age of eleven. After noticing an ad in the Sunday newspaper for Belgian Sheepdog puppies, I pleaded with my parents and finally talked them into letting me get a purebred dog to show and train "all on my own." We set off in the family car, our spirits and expectations high. When we arrived, the owner of the dam showed me a blue ribbon the bitch had won but warned me not to get "my face too close to her." We went out back to

see the pups, and I tried to scrutinize the ten wiggling, wagging bundles of black fluff. It was nearly impossible to tell the difference from one pup to the next and their wild antics and clambering didn't help. One male, however, stood out because he was taller than the others and his ears were already standing. "I like that big one," I said. "Why, honey he is the pick of the litter," said the owner

*I purchased, and triumphantly carried home the reluctant "pick of the litter."*

of the bitch, and sensing my interest, she began rattling off the good qualities of that puppy. The pup, however, hung back warily despite my coaxing and finally went off to a corner of the makeshift run and crawled behind some boards. I followed him but he refused to come out. When I reached to pet him, he growled.



To make a long story short, I purchased, and triumphantly carried home the reluctant “pick of the litter.” As it turned out, he was so nervous he could never keep weight on, he paced constantly, fought any strange dog, male or female, hid behind chairs and shivered when strangers came into the house, and growled at anyone including family members if they approached his bed. This was despite obedience classes, consultations with professionals, and so forth. Two years later, I tearfully parted with my pet when he began jumping the fence and biting children at an elementary school a couple of blocks away.

The lesson I learned was: no matter *what* the dog looks like, one first has to be able to live with him. *Never pick a puppy for looks alone.*

In the years that followed, I continued my interest in purebred dogs, especially in the sport of obedience training. I owned several other dogs of various breeds, but the question still remained with me: How do you pick the puppy with the best temperament?

The very first difficulty I encountered was the wide variations in what people meant by “good” temperament. One breeder might say a good-tempered dog was assertive and protective, and another would say the same dog was vicious. Some breeders would describe a good-tempered dog as easy going and gentle and others would disparage the dog as “soft.”

In Belgian Tervurens, the breed standard calls for a dog that is “aloof” with strangers. One owner proudly explained this characteristic to me while his bitch tucked her tail and tried to hide behind him. Most breeders I talked to were sincere in their belief that their dog’s temperament was “good” and were willing to guarantee temperament on puppies they sold. However, it was extremely confusing and difficult for me, as a novice, to sort out exactly what each breeder meant when he said “good temperament.”

In my efforts to find a convenient way to test a puppy’s temperament, I not only did a great deal of reading but also was lucky enough to be able to consult with Jack and Wendy Volhard, learn about their way of puppy testing, how it originated, and also to be involved in testing several litters. I feel that had I known this information earlier many mistakes could have been avoided. After participating in a number of “kitchen-table debates” I gradually began to sort out information. As soon as someone quoted a source or a theory I scurried off to the library and read the book.

One of the first things to come to light was that in puppy temperament testing, there are several inherent problems. (1) What is a “good” temperament? (2) How much of a puppy’s temperament is hereditary? (3) How much influence does environment have on the puppy’s temperament? (4) How can we accurately predict temperament of the adult dog?

What became obvious after a time was that in general, “good” temperament means that the dog is well-suited for the *owner’s* preference and purposes. “Good” temperament in a dog for a quiet, inactive older person in an apartment will be different from “good” temperament in a dog for a military K-9 corps handler.

Because of this, it is more useful to define traits or components of temperament and what one can expect from combinations of traits, rather than to say this temperament is good, this one is bad. In choosing a puppy an understanding of what traits suit the owner and handler is essential.



An understanding of the traits themselves and what traits were genetically selected for in the different breeds is also important. The tendency to freeze when scenting a bird is selected for in Pointers, the tendency to “eye” and circle has been selected for in Sheepdogs, the tendency to hunt by sight in Greyhounds, and so on. These tendencies, although undeveloped, can be observed in most dogs, but selective breeding has enhanced them.

In addition to these breed traits, there are basic traits found in every dog which are good indicators for how well the dog will adapt to living with humans.

William Campbell, Dog Behavior Consultant, has listed behavioral traits which are common to all breeds and which influence temperament.

1. **Excitability vs Inhibitability.** This trait is an inherited tendency which in the excitable dog makes him extremely responsive to external stimuli. Field trial retrievers are selected for this trait because they need to be constantly aware of the hunt, the fall of the bird, etc.

The inhibited dog shows more self control. This dog is more easily trained to react only upon certain cues. Campbell cites the Schutzhund German Shepherd as an example.

The balance between excitability and inhibitability is a poised, assured dog. The extreme of excitability would be a wild uncontrollable dog. The extreme of inhibitability would be the withdrawn, rigid, and lethargic dog.

2. **Active vs. Passive Defense Reflexes.** This trait is the inherited tendency to react to stress by biting, freezing, or running away. The dog with passive defense reflexes can be induced to bite only with difficulty or under extreme duress.

The field trial retriever has been selected for passive defense reflex so as to avoid killing wounded birds, etc. On the other hand, the Schutzhund Shepherd

has been selected for active defense reflexes so he can easily be trained for protection. This is combined with his tendency towards inhibitability and allows the owner to train the dog to attack only in specific situations.



3. **Dominant vs. Submissive.** The dominant dog is one which would grow up to be the pack leader if he and the other puppies had been left to grow up on their own in the wild. He shows the behavioral tendency to dominate. This trait is expressed by biting,

growling, mounting, direct eye contact, walking with head up, tail up, hackles up, etc. The dominant dog will have first pick of the food, places to sleep, etc. Dominance has been selected for in Fox Terriers, originally bred to drag foxes from their dens.

As Campbell points out, the dominant dog may challenge his human master and needs consistent, firm, calm handling. Lack of leadership on the owner's part with such a dog will result in the dog's assuming leadership. A dog's attempts to lead in today's hectic, complex society usually result in maladaptive responses such as overprotectiveness, nervousness, refusal to obey, and interfering with owner's interactions with other people.

Submissiveness is evident in the dog which accepts leadership. This is expressed in behavioral terms as nudging with the nose, pawing, tail down, ears down, lack of fighting, crouching and rolling over on the back, lack of eye contact, submitting to command. This dog can be influenced easily by the leader. This trait has been selected for in spaniels who were originally bred to crouch while hunters shot or netted the birds.

*It is obvious that the combination of traits or tendencies with which a puppy is born will go into its temperament*

4. **Independence vs. Social Attraction.** The independent dog is not interested in human beings. He may be poorly socialized or simply a loner. This dog may work or hunt well on his own. This trait was selected for in the Basenji, for example, a dog which originally hunted alone with a bell around its neck; the humans followed the sound of the bell to the game.

The socially attracted dog shows interest in people, enjoys being petted, follows human being easily, and in general wants to be where they are. Poodles have been selected for this trait. They are tuned in to people and make good pets for this reason, which may explain why they have been number 1 in registrations for the last 18 years.

It is obvious that the combination of traits or tendencies with which a puppy is born will go into its temperament. The particular combination will result in a dog more suited for some things than others. For example, just because the dog has active defense reflexes doesn't mean he will be a good guard dog. If he is highly excitable and very independent, this dog may respond to any and all stimuli, be unresponsive to training, and also bite under the slightest stress.

I now realize that my "pick of the litter" puppy was exactly such a dog. His constant activity, lack of interest in being petted, deep-rooted suspicion of any and all people, combined with his tendency to bite under stress, all fit into this pattern. Since he over-reacted to almost any stimuli (noises outside, vacuum sweepers, radios, any movement such as a napkin falling, a person sneezing, doors opening, etc., etc.) and since he often perceived such stimuli as a threat, he was extremely difficult to live with. I now understand that such a dog requires special handling techniques which would be beyond the ability of the average eleven year old, to say the least!

In addition, Humphrey and Warner in their book *Working Dogs* suggest two other important inherited characteristics.

1. **Sound sensitivity.** The sound sensitive dog shows excessive fear, crouching, urinating, running away when confronted with a loud or sharp sound; the dog may overreact to gunshots, shouted commands, etc.
2. **Touch sensitivity vs. insensitivity.** The touch sensitive dog will be difficult to train with the standard training collar because the correction snap sets off the dog's defensive reflexes (biting, freezing, running away).

The touch insensitive dog shows little response to physical stimuli. A mighty yank on the training collar yields little if any response. Touch insensitivity was selected for in the pit-fighting dogs, in order for them to continue fighting despite severe wounds.

What is commonly called a "hard" dog is often a combination of dominant, and touch insensitive. This dog shows a strong tendency to lead, and will be difficult to train. When the owner attempts to assert himself through a corrective snap on the training collar, the dog doesn't respond because it cannot feel the collar. To get results, the owner will have to resort to more forceful methods of correction, or use a different stimuli.

An owner of an Irish Setter was once heard to say in despair, "The only thing that damn dog understands is pain. You have to belt him with a 2 x 4 to get anything through that thick head of his." The dog turned out to be dominant, and touch insensitive. The dog did **not** respond to the correction which he never felt unless it was unusually harsh, which in turn made his gentle owner feel terribly guilty. Food turned out to be a more successful stimulus to get her dog to obey commands.

I could now see from my discussions and reading that I was getting somewhere in terms of dealing with the knotty problem of temperament and its hereditary origin.

"But doesn't environment play a large part in how a dog develops temperamentally?" I asked. Anyone can easily cite a dozen examples of friendly puppies who turned out mean because of teasing cruel treatment, or misguided handlers. Other examples include wild, mistreated, or problem animals who developed into fine pets and working dogs with proper treatment and environment. The *Royal Air Force K-9 Corps* has a motto "A handler always ends up with the dog he deserves," suggesting that the handler is *entirely* responsible for his dog's performance, quality, etc.

A dog, however, is not a clean slate when he is born; he possesses inborn tendencies and characteristics. If this were not true there would be no breed traits and any dog would be as easy to train for field trials, ratting, and guiding the blind as any other. However, it has come to light that environment plays a tremendous part in *developing* a dog's potential. As Dr. Michael Fox puts it in *Understanding Your Dog*:

"Genetic factors are transmitted by inheritance, but the traits themselves are modified by interacting genetic and environmental factors. Training and early experience greatly influence these traits..."

In the light of research on dogs done at Bar Harbor by Drs. Scott and Fuller, it has been determined that the influence on temperament occurs *much earlier* (3-12 weeks) in dogs than previously suspected. The early environment and learning of the puppy is the most important. In these critical stages of the dog, the environ-



ment and experiences have the **most** lasting impression on the dog. A traumatic event in these periods may forever influence the dog. The effect may be modified through training but the dog may never reach its potential had that traumatic event not occurred.

The following is a brief synopsis of the critical stages of the dog as revealed by the research of Scott and Fuller.

## Stage 1

**1-3 weeks (1-20 days).** The puppy needs warmth, food, sleep, and his mother. Neurologically very primitive, the puppy responds by reflex and essentially it is unable to learn.

**4<sup>th</sup> week (21-28 days).** The puppy needs its mother most at this time. It is a period of extremely rapid sensory development. Neurologically the brain is suddenly able to receive messages; the circuits are “turned on.” Weaning should NOT take place at this time; the puppy is extremely vulnerable.

**5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> week (29-49 days).** The puppy needs his mother and littermates. Dogs removed from the litter at this period tend to be unable to socialize with other dogs, may fight, refuse to breed, etc. Contact with humans and gentle training is beneficial and helps the pup set the stage for more intense contact with humans later on.

**7<sup>th</sup> week (49th-56th day).** This is the ideal time for the puppy to transfer his loyalty to his new owner. Mentally he is able to learn whatever any adult dog can learn, his brain is neurologically complete. However, physically he will not be able to do the tasks of an adult dog. For example he can't jump one and a half times his height with the dumbbell in his mouth, but he can learn the exercise if it is scaled down to his size. Socialization and training should continue on a regular basis. Bonds formed at this time are extremely strong.

**8-10 weeks (57-70 days).** This is the fear imprinting period. Any traumatic experience such as shipping, ear cropping, severe punishment, etc. may have a lasting effect on the dog. New experiences must be non-fear producing. Proper training and socialization should continue.

**11-16 weeks (71-112 days).** The puppy continues to learn from his experiences. If left with other dogs, he may become imprinted only to dogs, taking his leadership from them and never developing a strong relationship with human beings. Lack of socialization with humans will result in shy behavior such as found in wild animals. Lack of exposure to other environments and exploration may result in “kennel syndrome,” where the dog is unable to cope with any change from his routine environment.

Clarence Pfaffengerger was able to put the critical stages of puppy development into practical application in the breeding program of Guide Dogs for the Blind. He used Scott and Fuller's research and supplemented it with specially developed puppy tests to pinpoint the potential guide dogs in a litter at approximately 8 weeks of age. Through planned breeding, careful attention to development, and puppy testing, he raised the percentage of successful guide dogs in the breeding program from 9% to 90%.



An experiment of Clarence Pfaffenberger's, for example, demonstrates the importance of early socialization. After testing the population of 154 puppies who were all trained later for guide work he found: "of the puppies who had passed their tests and been placed in homes the first week after the conclusion of the tests, ninety percent became guide dogs; those who were in the kennel more than one week and less than two weeks fared almost but not quite as well; those left in the kennel more than two weeks but less than three, showed only about 57% guide dogs; of those who were in the kennel more than three weeks after the tests, only 30% became guide dogs." (*The New Knowledge of Dog Behavior*.) The break in socialization between testing and placing at this critical point (after 7-8 weeks) resulted in dogs who could not take the responsibility for a blind master, while their littermates whose socialization had not been interrupted, succeeded at the task.

By using Campbell, Pfaffenberger, and *Working Dogs*, the Volhards developed a system for testing puppies which would (1) indicate the dog's basic temperament traits and (2) indicate the dog with the most obedience potential.

All of Campbell's tests are included since these are indicators of how the pup will adapt to living with human beings. Most of the dogs in the U.S. today are first and foremost family companions, a fact which seems to have been largely ignored by breeders of show, field trial, and guard dogs.

There are three tests which are from Pfaffenberger to indicate the attitude the puppy has for obedience work. (Pfaffenberger describes a number of other tests indicative of attitude for guide work where it is critical that a dog be able to make intelligent decisions in response to unexpected situations. If he is guiding a blind master, his master's life may depend upon it. This ability is not a matter of life and death in the obedience ring, although exhibitors sometimes seem to think so.) One test is from *Working Dogs*, where in 1934, a test was suggested for touch sensitivity in the German Shepherd. A slightly modified version is included in the Volhard tests.

The result is called the Puppy Aptitude Test (PAT), since it indicates which pup has the most aptitude for the desired task or purpose. The test is administered in a standard fashion to minimize human error. Conditions under which testing takes place are as follows:

1. Ideally puppies are tested in the 7<sup>th</sup> week, preferably the 49<sup>th</sup> day. At 6 weeks or earlier the puppy's neurological connections are not fully developed. (If the test is conducted between 8-10 weeks, the puppy is in the fear imprint stage and special care must be taken not to frighten it.)
2. Puppies are tested individually, away from dam and littermates, in an area new to them and relatively free from distractions. It could be a porch, garage, living room, yard, or whatever. Puppies should be tested before a meal when they are awake and lively and not on a day when they have been wormed or given their puppy shots.
3. The sequence of the tests is the same for all pups and is designed to alternate a slightly stressful test with a neutral or pleasant one.
4. There is less chance for human error, or the puppies being influenced by a familiar person, if the tests are administered by someone other than the owner of the litter. A friend of the owner, or the prospective buyer can easily learn to give the test.



Test	Purpose	Score	1
<b>SOCIAL ATTRACTION</b> Place puppy in test area. From a few feet away the testor coaxes the pup to her/him by clapping hands gently and kneeling down. Testor must coax in a direction away from the point where it entered the testing area.	Degree of social attraction, confidence, or dependence.	Came readily, tail up, jumped, bit at hands. Came readily, tail up, pawed, licked at hands. *Came readily, tail up. Came readily, tail down. Came hesitantly, tail down. Didn't come at all.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>FOLLOWING</b> Stand up and walk away from the pup in a normal manner. Make sure the pup sees you walk away.	Degree of following attraction. Not following indicates independence.	Followed readily, tail up, got underfoot, bit at feet. Followed readily, tail up, got underfoot. *Followed readily, tail up. Followed readily, tail down. Followed hesitantly, tail down. No follow or went away.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>RESTRAINT</b> Crouch down and gently roll the pup on his back and hold it with one hand for a full 30 seconds.	Degree of dominant or submissive tendency. How it accepts stress, when socially/physically dominated.	Struggled fiercely, flailed, bit. Struggled fiercely, flailed. *Settled, struggled, settled with some eye contact. Struggled then settled. No struggle. *No struggle, straining to avoid eye contact.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>SOCIAL DOMINANCE</b> Let pup stand up and gently stroke him from the head to back while you crouch beside him. continue stroking until a recognizable behavior is established.	Degree of acceptance of social dominance. Pup may try to dominate by jumping and nipping or is independent and walks away.	Jumped, pawed, bit, growled. Jumped, pawed. *Cuddles up to testor and tries to lick face. Squirmed, licked at hands. Rolled over, licked at hands. Went away and stayed away.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>ELEVATION DOMINANCE</b> Bend over and cradle the pup under its belly, fingers interlaced, palms up and elevate it just off the ground. Hold it there for 30 seconds.	Degree of accepting dominance while in position of no control.	Struggled fiercely, bit, growled. Struggled fiercely. *No struggle, relaxed. Struggled, settled, licked. No struggle, licked at hands. *No struggle, froze.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>OBEDIENCE APTITUDE</b>			
<b>RETRIEVING</b> Crouch beside pup and attract his attention with crumpled up paper ball. When the pup shows interest and is watching, toss the object 4-6 feet in front of pup.	Degree of willingness to work with a human. High correlation between ability to retrieve and successful guide dogs, obedience dogs, field trial dogs.	Chases object, picks up object and runs away. Chases object, stands over object, does not return. Chases object and returns with object to testor. Chases object and returns without object to testor. Starts to chase object, loses interest. Does not chase object.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>TOUCH SENSITIVITY</b> Take puppy's webbing of one front foot and press between finger and thumb lightly then more firmly until you get a response, while you count slowly to 10. Stop as soon as puppy pulls away or shows discomfort.	Degree of sensitivity to touch.	8-10 counts before response. 6-7 counts before response. 5-6 counts before response. 2-4 counts before response. 1-2 counts before response.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>SOUND SENSITIVITY</b> Place pup in the center of area, testor or assitant makes a sharp noise a few feet from the puppy. A large metal spoon struck sharply on a metal pan twice works well.	Degree of sensitivity to sound. (Also can be a rudimentary test for deafness.)	Listens, locates sound, walks toward it barking. Listens, locates sound barks. Listens, locates sound, shows curiosity and walks toward sound Listens, locates the sound. Cringes, backs off, hides. Ignores sound, shows no curiosity.	1 2 3 4 5 6
<b>SIGHT SENSITIVITY</b> Place pup in center of room. Tie a string around a large towel and jerk it across the floor a few feet away from puppy.	Degree of intelligent response to strange object.	Looks, attacks, and bites. Looks, barks, and tail up. Looks curiously, attempts to investigate. Looks, barks, tail-tuck. Runs away, hides.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>STRUCTURE</b> The puppy is gently set in a natural stance and evaluated for structure in the following categories: Straight front, Straight rear, Shoulder layback, Front angulation, Croup angulation, Rear angulation	Degree of structural soundness. Good structure is necessary.	The puppy is correct in structure. The puppy has a slight fault or deviation. The puppy has an extreme fault or deviation	G F P



5. I found it helpful to arrange the tests in a concise chart form following the order in which they are given. In addition, since I found it difficult to use Campbell's scoring code, I simply gave each response a number. While testing numerous puppies, the Volhards found that a number of puppies showed responses not on Campbell's test. These observations are included in the test with an asterisk in order to differentiate them from Campbell's original tests. The Pfaffenberger tests were also given a number so that all scores can be compared and a chart was devised for checking a puppy's total performance at a glance.

*The safest and easiest thing to do when faced with parent dogs of undesirable temperament is simply to look for another litter of pups...*

6. Also included in the Obedience Aptitude Tests is a section on structure. Over 60 breeds conform to what is called "conventional body type," that is, 45 degree shoulder layback and 90 degree angulation front and rear. The greater the deviation from this norm the less efficiently the dog will be able to perform obedience exercises. Other impediments to efficiency are hip dysplasia, cowhocks, eastie-westie feet, crossing in front or rear when gaiting. A simple guide to follow for puppies at this age (7-8 weeks) is "what you see is what you get" notwithstanding the all-too familiar assurance "don't worry, he'll grow out of it." Be particularly wary of the statement, "he's not much of a conformation dog but he'll do fine in obedience." This could mean the dog is perhaps mismarked or has light eyes, but is structurally sound. However, often it means the dog has a serious structural fault. This dog will be unable to take the strenuousness of training and competing in the obedience ring.

If you feel that evaluating structure accurately is above your head, seek competent help.

7. Last but not least, the prospective puppy testor must have a chance to observe the parents of the litter, preferably both parents but at least the dam. If the sire and/or dam have characteristics which are not desirable there exists a good chance some, if not all, of the puppies will have inherited these undesirable traits. The fact that the breeder of my "pick of the litter" warned me not to get my face close to the dam should have been a tip off to watch for excitability and a tendency to bite in the puppies.

The safest and easiest thing to do when faced with parent dogs of undesirable temperament is simply to look for another litter of pups whose sire and dam more closely conform to your ideals. If you *must* have a pup from this litter pay particular attention to the test scores of the litter and do *not* select a pup which shows any tendency towards undesirable traits.

## Interpretation of Scores

### Mostly 1s

This dog is extremely dominant and has aggressive tendencies. He is quick to bite and is generally considered not good with children and elderly. When combined



with a 1 or 2 in touch sensitivity, will be a difficult dog to train. Not a dog for the inexperienced handler, takes a competent trainer to establish leadership.

## Mostly 2s

This dog is dominant and can be provoked to bite. Responds well to firm, consistent, fair handling in an adult household, and is likely to be a loyal pet once it respects its human leader. Often has bouncy, outgoing temperament, may be too active for elderly and too dominant for small children.

## Mostly 3s

This dog accepts humans and leaders easily, is best prospect for the average owner, adapts well to new situations and is generally good with children and elderly, although may be inclined to be active. Makes a good obedience prospect and usually has commonsense approach to life.

## Mostly 4s

This dog is submissive and will adapt to most households. May be slightly less outgoing and active than a dog scoring mostly 3s. Gets along well with children generally and trains well.

## Mostly 5s

This dog is extremely submissive and needs special handling to build confidence and bring him out of his shell. Does not adapt well to change or confusion and needs a very regular, structured environment. Usually safe around children and bites only when severely stressed. Not a good choice for a beginner since it frightens easily, and takes a long time to get used to new experiences.

## Mostly 6s

This dog is independent. He is not affectionate and may dislike petting and cuddling. It is difficult to establish a relationship with him whether for working or for pet. Not recommended for children who may force attention on him; he is not a beginner's dog.

- A. When combined with 1s, especially in restraint: the independent dog is likely to bite under stress.
- B. When combined with 5s: the independent dog is likely to hide from people, or freeze when approached by a stranger

## No Clear Pattern. (Several 1s, 2s, and 5s)

This dog may not be feeling well. Perhaps just ate or was recently wormed. Wait two days and retest. If the test still shows wide variations (lots of 1s and 5s) he is probably unpredictable and unlikely to be a good pet or obedience dog.

## Tips

3 in social attraction and social dominance. The socially attracted dog is more easily taught to come and is more cuddly and friendly. Its interest in people can be a useful tool in training, despite other scores.



1 in restraint and 1 in touch sensitivity. The dominant aggressive dog, insensitive to touch will be a handful to train and extremely difficult for anyone other than an exceptionally competent trainer.

5 in stability. This is likely to be a “spooky” dog which is never desirable. It requires a great deal of extra work to get a spooky dog adapted to new situations and they generally can’t be depended upon in a crisis.

5 in touch and sound sensitivity. May also be very “spooky” and needs delicate handling to prevent the dog from becoming frightened.

After I understood the concepts involved in Puppy Aptitude Testing I was eager to observe it first hand. Wendy invited me to accompany her when she tested a litter

*Little “Orange” cocked her ears, galloped over and attempted to lick Wendy’s face.*

of ten Newfoundland puppies. Two prospective buyers, who could not be present, had asked Wendy to select puppies for them. Buyer A wanted a bouncy lively dog with good conformation: a dog who would fit in with her two children and would be outgoing and attract attention in the show ring. The buyer stated she could not stand a dog that “hid under the table” when a family squabble occurred.

Buyer B, on the other hand, a quiet, reserved person, wanted a companion with obedience potential. He and his wife had no children and wanted a dog with a common sense attitude that would adapt to a quiet country life, but had the capability of working.

When I arrived, Wendy gathered up a handful of score sheets, ten colored pens, and ten colored ribbons, a large metal pot, a large metal spoon, a roll of paper towels, a bath towel, a ball of twine, a crumpled sheet of paper, a protractor, and a watch with a second hand. She packed them into a paper bag and thrust it at me saying, “You will be in charge of recording and assisting.” Leaving me no time to express my inadequacies, we rushed off to the breeder. When we arrived, our ten unsuspecting subjects were being cleaned off after splashing in the mud and they were lively and ready for action.

The pups were 48 days old and were due to be sent off to their new homes on the weekend, approximately their 51<sup>st</sup> day.

We decided that the breeder would bring the pups, one at a time, into the testing area, in this case the living room. I was to be in charge of tying a colored ribbon around the puppy’s neck and marking the score sheets in the same color. I took the paper sack full of goodies and went to sit on the stairs where I would not distract the puppies and had a good view of the action.

The breeder headed for the kennel and returned a few minutes later with a black female in her arms. I tied an orange ribbon in a snug bow around her neck then the breeder plunked her down in the doorway.

Wendy knelt down and attracted the puppy’s attention by holding out her arms and saying “puppy, puppy, puppy” in a friendly way. Little “Orange” cocked her ears,

galloped over and attempted to lick Wendy's face. "Score that a 3, she came readily, tail up, licked at face," said Wendy.

Wendy then stood up and walked away. Little Orange was fascinated by the pant legs and yapped gleefully when she caught up to Wendy and tried to get in front. "Score that a 2, she followed readily, and go underfoot," said Wendy. "What's next?" "Restraint," I said. "Get the watch with the second hand, and tell me when 30 seconds are up."

Wendy gently rolled Little Orange onto her back and placed one hand on her chest. Little Orange was not at all happy at this turn of events and said so emphatically. At the same time she kicked and struggled fiercely and flailed the air with her feet, her mouth open, trying to bite the hand that held her. Wendy had some trouble keeping the pup on its back. "Time," I called out.

"Thank goodness! Definitely a 1, struggled fiercely, flailed, bit, what a fighter! Next?" asked Wendy.

Social attraction was next, and the pup seemed to be getting her bearings while Wendy stroked gently from head to tail. Wendy kept one hand cupped around the puppy's chest lightly until a clear pattern was established. Little Orange decided that she enjoyed petting and tried to lick Wendy's face. "Score that a 3, she cuddles and licks," said Wendy.

Next Wendy gently cupped her hands underneath the puppy's rib cage and lifted her about 10 inches off the floor. Little Orange looked around but seemed relatively undisturbed. "She's not at all tense or fearful, I'd score that a 3."

"Time for the obedience aptitude," said Wendy, "Hand me the crumpled paper." When I gave it to her, Wendy squatted beside Little Orange and wiggled the paper in front of the puppy's nose. When Little Orange began biting playfully at it, Wendy tossed it about four feet away. Little Orange promptly pounded on it, picked it up and shook it. She then looked at Wendy and galloped off in the opposite direction, which earned her a score of 1.

Wendy then collected the pup, lifted one of her front feet and gently pinched the skin between the pup's toes; at first very lightly, then gradually bearing down until the pup winced slightly and pulled her foot away. "it took about seven counts, a little on the insensitive side, I would say." I scored it a 2.

For the next test, sound sensitivity, I remained where I was, and clanked the metal spoon against the pot, sharply. Little Orange looked up. At the next clank one could almost hear her thinking, "What the devil was that noise?" as she cocked her ears and twisted her head around. She did not, however, walk



towards the sound. I scored her a 4.

Next I tied a six-foot length of twine around the bath towel while Wendy distracted the puppy with some cuddling. I placed the towel across the floor in front of them. Wendy instructed me not to drag the towel towards the pup, since we did not want her to be threatened, but simply to respond to a moving object. Little Orange watched with great interest as the towel jerked across the floor then walked over and attempted to sniff the towel. "Score that a 3, attempts to investigate," said Wendy.

Finally Wendy evaluated the structure of Little Orange by placing her in a natural stance. I found it difficult with my unpracticed eye to pick out the structural faults, but I found that measuring of the angles of the shoulder and hips with a small protractor a good way to check my guesses.

After all the fuss, Little Orange was given a couple of minutes of extra attention, was taken back to the kennel and we proceeded to test the rest of the litter.

At the end of the testing (I was somewhat exhausted) we relaxed with a cup of coffee and compared the scores of the puppies. Following is a chart comparing four of the puppies. As you can see, Little Orange was the most dominant and scored above the shaded area four times. Importantly, she was not fearful when faced by a strange situation, she did not spook during the stability or sound test. Her scores indicated that she was affectionate with people, something that would help to temper her tendency to touch insensitivity and dominance.

Green on the other hand scored in the shaded area and was much less dominant than Orange and more willing to accept human beings as leaders. Green showed excellent reactions to retrieving, the stability and sound tests, and was medium sensitive to touch. In addition, Green had excellent conformation.

Red was very similar to Green in scores but the straight shoulder structure predicts the dog would have difficulty in standing up to the rigors of jumping required in advanced competition.

Yellow's scores below the shaded area indicate that she was much more submissive than the three others. In addition, she had a five on the stability test and scored very sensitive to sound and touch. Such a dog would be unlikely to do well in obedience competition, and indeed may need special handling and a very supportive home.

Although Orange and Green both had good structure and were both "typey" specimens of their breed, Orange's scores suggested she would be a handful to train and that she did not have the aptitude which Green had for obedience work. However, Orange's dominance and excellent reaction to noisy, active situations, made her a likely candidate for Buyer A's household and also for the breed ring. Green, on the other hand, went to Buyer B, since she came closest to his requirements. Upon being questioned one year later both buyers, (who, incidentally, own other dogs), stated that their respective dog met, in fact exceeded, all their expectations.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am grateful for having had an opportunity to observe Puppy Aptitude Testing and I mean to present this article much in the same manner as the Volhards presented it to me, not a gospel but as one way of matching the right dog with the right owner.



With the soaring number of unwanted pets, I feel it is important to be able to select a pet which is likely to fit the owner's needs and adapt to complexities of modern life. It is important for the prospective buyer to have a tool to recognize what he is seeing.

Most people would never dream of buying a car because "it was the nicest color" but many people will buy a puppy because it "has the best markings." I shudder to think what most parents would say if their daughter told them she would marry the first man to walk up to her on the street, but they would think nothing of it if she picked a puppy because it was the first out of the whelping box. This puppy *may* be the right choice, then again, it may not, depending on what other traits make up its temperament. Hopefully, the PAT will help the prospective buyer make a more educated choice.

The PAT can also be tailored to the needs of the breeder. In the case of the Volhards, the aptitude tests were developed to show obedience potential. It would be easy enough to test for aptitude in other areas such as field trial work, scent hound work, sheep herding (see Fox, 1975) and so forth. Testing puppies is certainly not a new idea—Fortunate Fields in 1934, describes puppy tests for the working GSD.

The breeder would use the information in the PAT not only to help determine which pup is most suited for which home but also to determine what temperament to select for. An example might be a breeding of an extremely sensitive but very socially attracted bitch with a medium sensitive but independent stud hoping for medium sensitive puppies which accepted leadership and liked people. However, this combination *could* produce extremely sensitive independent puppies, exactly the opposite of the desired result. The breeder could, by testing the puppies, determine which characteristics each puppy had inherited and then breed only from the puppies possessing the desired combination.

In the final analysis, owning and training a dog can and should be a joy. Much of this goal is achieved through hard work, but it is infinitely easier by starting out with the right dog. Whether the PAT is used by a breeder, buyer, or trainer, I hope it will help contribute to a successful experience in dog ownership.

## References

- Campbell, William E. *Behavior Problems in Dogs*. American Veterinary Publications, 1975.
- Fox, Dr. Michael W. *Understanding Your Dog*. Conard, McCann, Geoghegan, 1972.
- Gibbs, Margaret, Kennel Dog to House Pet: Looking at Kennel Dog Syndrome. *Purebred Dogs, AKC Gazette*, January 1978, pp 24-33.
- Humphrey, Elliot and Warner, Lucien. *Working Dogs*, National Press 1974 (first published in 1934).
- Pfaffenberger, Clarence J. *The New Knowledge of Dog Behavior*, Howell, 1963.
- Scott, Dr. John Paul & Fuller, Dr. John L. *Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog*, University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Trumler, Eberhard. *Your Dog & You*, Seabury Press, 1973.

Melissa Bartlett, MS, OTR has a Masters degree in Occupational Therapy from Virginia Commonwealth University and is presently working at the Oswego County Mental Health Center in Oswego, NY.

