ABOUT THE AKITA

Choosing an Akita (or any dog) based on a specific appearance or type, for example, because he/she looks just like your previous dog, or because you like a particular color, pattern, or size can be setting yourself and the dog up for disappointment or failure. Someone whose online pictures and profile are appealing to you may not be your perfect match, and if you leave your options open you'll have a much better chance for success. Luckily for us, Akitas come in many different colors and we have had purebred Akitas ranging from the unusual ~50 lbs to well over 100 lbs. so there are plenty of choices. “Looks" should be the least important criteria when it comes to choosing the best dog for you.

Anyone considering owning this breed needs to know the hardships and difficulties that can come with owning them. TRAINING IS A MUST FROM DAY 1 and must be continuously reinforced. This is a very head strong breed and they are challenging. You will often hear owners state that "This is not the breed for everyone" or "This is not the breed for a beginner dog owner." There are reasons this is said about the Akita.

 Akitas, per the breed standard, can be wary and (over)protective with strangers and aggressive with other dogs, particularly those of the same sex.

While there are Akitas who love everyone and get along with other dogs and other animals, they are the exception and not the rule. Knowing and understanding the standard temperament for the Akita breed is important when going into ownership of them. People have a misconception that acquiring an Akita puppy is the way to prevent them from being intolerant of other animals. However many still mature with this temperament, despite extensive training and socialization. It is NOT all in how you raise them. Genetics play a massive role into the behavior of your dog. Go into ownership of this breed expecting it to behave as the standard depicts.

Proper raising, training and socializing is imperative to a well rounded and balanced dog. That said, understand that genetically predisposed behaviors cannot be "trained" out. You never train away genetics. You manage them. So while you may raise an Akita that grows intolerant to other animals and doesn't want to allow guests onto your property, you can manage those behaviors and train the dog in a way that they don't become reactive, aggressive and dangerous.

Many people who don't do the proper research prior to purchasing one go into ownership of the breed blind. They purchased a cute and fluffy puppy, one that grows into a beautiful and regal dog .. but they weren't prepared for the temperament and challenges that came along with it.

This is why we see so many Akitas find themselves in the shelters or rescues. Very seldom are Akitas owned by breed savvy and breed educated people turned into the shelters. Most Akitas find their way into shelters by simply being what they are - Akitas. They were just unfortunate to find themselves in the hands of someone who didn't know what to do with them.

Same sex aggression is common in the breed. Even dogs raised with another dog of the same sex may mature to not get along with them. Many owners find themselves at wits end when their two boys or two girls who were once best friends have begun violently fighting. For this reason, ethical breeders and rescues rarely place their dogs into same sex homes. This is something to be prepared for when considering an Akita.

Akitas are a hunting breed. Because of this, they can have a very high prey drive. We are brought the bodies of many woodland critters that were unfortunate enough to find their way into the yard. This is not a temperament issue, this is again .. genetics. It is something to make note of and prepare for, especially if you have cats or other small animals. The Akita must be introduced to and trained to properly interact with them early on, and even then there are no 100% guarantees and it is solely the responsibility of the owners to keep all of their animals safe. Akitas may accept small animals that he/she perceives to be a part of their own family, but other small “invader" or “stranger” creatures may be considered fair game.

Because of their prey drive, Akitas are not usually appropriate for off leash environments including dog parks, dog beaches, the woods,, hiking areas, etc. If you envision your dog frolicking around freely without a leash off of your own property, then an Akita is probably not your best choice.

These dogs are very smart and typically very clean. For this reason, they are usually very easy to housebreak. They shed like crazy and you must be able to live with the constant possibility of a large amount of dog hair. A good vacuum is an important part of owning an Akita!

They learn commands and tricks quickly as well, but they tend to get bored fast and are quite stubborn. Finding a way to keep them engaged during training can be tricky. Some are not at all food motivated and require other “bribes" to keep them interested. If an Akita feels that an activity is pointless and requires repeatedly performing the same tasks over and over again, they may simply decide to quit and not do it any more which can make some Akitas unsuitable for certain kinds of service dog work.

They are very in tune to their owners as families. This isn't the breed to leave out in a cage or on a chain. They like to be with their people and form very strong bonds. They can be wonderful with children in the family, but it is also important to note .. children must be taught respect for the dog. They are not an overly tolerant breed. So a child pulling, jumping on, hitting or kicking the dog can end very badly. The breed has a commanding presence and respect is needed in all outlets of its life.

Boundaries and rules should be set early on and upheld. They do best in a structured and consistent environment. The idea that they are constantly trying to dominate you or being the alpha is false; however, if you don't take charge ... they will. It's important that they know their place and what is expected of them. It is important that an Akita have adequate mental stimulation and interaction with their chosen people. Akitas left alone in a yard all day tend to get bored, may become destructive and can easily escape any fence less than at least 6 feet tall. Many Akitas are adept at opening gates and latches so you may have to take some extra steps to keep them secured.

Akitas are generally introverted and do not necessarily want to make friends or even meet new people. At times they just want to be left alone. They can be anywhere from aloof to protective with strangers and if your dog is on the overly protective side, you may need to keep your Akita away from guests or visitors to your home. You may also have to be sure that any visitors or guests understand that they cannot meet or interact with your Akita in the same way that they can interact with other kinds of dogs.

Akitas are fiercely loyal and have fantastic memories. Famous Akita Hachiko went to the train station every day for 9 years in search of his owner who had passed away. If you are an Akita's chosen person, this can be amazing. But, having such a sharp memory may also hold cause an Akita to hold grudges and a negative experience with another dog, a child or a stranger may change that Akitas behavior towards similar beings for life.

Akitas are a fantastic breed, but these are things to consider when thinking about bringing an Akita into your home. For an owner that is understanding of what they are and prepared to have that for the duration of their life - which very well may be 14+ years .. there is no better breed. But it is certainly not something to jump into and proper research and choosing the correct dog for your home and lifestyle is crucial. If you are part of the very lucky and small percentage of Akita owners who had the Akita version of a unicorn who was very social and got along with all humans and every other animal they encountered, congratulations and please consider yourself extremely fortunate that you were the rare exception. With ANY living creature including Akitas, each one must be treated as an individual and realistic expectations are very important to help you make an informed decision.

Written by Alexis Spalding and modified to be specific to rescue