

# Living With A Puli

By Susi Szeremy

**C**urrent thinking among cynologists suggests that, culturally speaking, dog breeds share traits with their tribe, their clan or their people more than was previously thought.

Couple this knowledge with the affectionate description of a Hungarian as being the only person who can follow you into a revolving door and come out ahead of you and suddenly, you have insight into the Puli.

The Puli is mischievous without malevolence. He is bouncy, but brainy, clever rather than crafty, spunky and spirited, exuberant and eager, but on his terms - and always, there is the inherent sense of humor, usually at his owner's expense. The greater the number of witnesses to the Puli's comedic brilliance, the more intense the practical joke. Pulik are keenly aware of an audience and delight in recruiting unwitting participants (Pulik, the Hungarian plural of Puli). To that end, the breed has an unerring sense of propriety and knows that when the in-laws are visiting, it is far more gratifying to drag a personal undergarment to the dinner table than, say, a shoe.

Thievery comes naturally to the Puli, who, easily bored, amuses himself by increasing the degrees of difficulty when "acquiring" possessions owned by someone else. Puppies start life with straightforward sock robbery, but adolescence sees advanced counter surfing and highly accomplished Pulik have been known to open sliding doors to claim a tasty prize as their own.

Puli owners should be individuals with their own strong sense of humor, a trait that could be considered part of the job description since they are so often required to rely upon it in a life shared with this breed.

Those unfamiliar with the Puli might mistake its high degree of intelligence for stubbornness. In fact, both are breed



*Pulik have a great sense of humor*



*A three month old Puli*



*We see Puli cords everywhere*

traits. Bred for centuries to be an independent thinker, the Puli is, nevertheless, extremely loyal to his family, and often, a particular individual within that family. A Puli has the best of intentions in serving his master, but when that master behaves in a manner at odds with the Puli's view of appropriate conduct, a difference of opin-

ion emerges and what is perceived to be obstinacy is merely the Puli exercising his God-given right to be, well, always right. In this way, life with a Puli is more of a collaboration than a "dominant-owner /sub-servient-dog" relationship. The Puli is simply too intelligent and intuitive to be ignored and cast off until his owner gets around to feeling sociable. He regards himself as a family member to be accorded the same level of respect and affection as anyone else. My own children have often felt

the need to remind my dogs that as they are my "human children," they trump the dogs in the pecking order.

I haven't had a Puli yet who bought into this.

Obedience work can be particularly challenging for the person training a Puli since the dog becomes easily bored. Because simple tasks are quickly mastered and easily tired of, it's the savvy Puli owner who knows to stay one step ahead of their dog by keeping training sessions interesting, challenging - and short. Agility come naturally to a dog described as "elastic," "athletic" and agile. And while a proper agility course is amusing to a Puli, he finds a home environment equally suitable for breathtaking high jumps, hair-pin turns and stop-on-a dime conclusions to a run raced at full speed. If their maneuvers occur over a glass table or a steaming turkey, oh well. The Puli will rarely go around anything he can jump over.

This an active breed. Not hyper, not nervous, and not mindlessly busy, but athletic and full of energy. A big backyard in which to run, romps in the park or long walks make for a more harmonious home life if the dog is allowed to expend himself. A tired Puli is a well behaved Puli.

One cannot remove centuries of breeding from the dog's nature, and as a sheep-dog, it is his job to shepherd the family. As such, he will rarely allow anyone to walk



from Point A to Point B without gentle teeth nips or nose nudging to help them along the way. He is protective of his flock, be they sheep or children, and the breed standard goes so far as to describe the Puli as being “sensibly suspicious of strangers.” Among his family, the Puli can be silly, gregarious and amusing, but all foolishness stops the moment someone not known to him enters the home. Careful breeding has made the Puli friendlier than his predecessors, but it is still his self appointed job to either investigate new people, or place himself between his people and strangers until circumstances have been deemed to be non-threatening. The Puli is and always will be a sheepdog with a job to do.

The Puli is typically “verbal” about his work. And his play. And about anything else which warrants his opinion. While the Puli doesn’t engage in mindless “mouthing off,” he does share his views about the world around him with an expressed point of view. Perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall the Puli is the inability to speak with words for there is always something to be said. The owner who can’t appreciate the constant wheels turning in the mind of this dog is the owner of a frustrated Puli. Far better to simply concede to the barking dog that why yes, what he has to say is most interesting, that his point has been made, and now it’s time to keep the rest of his opinion to himself, riveting as it is. A little respect goes a long way with a Puli.

As with all dogs, Pulik get along with other pets or with children if they’ve been properly socialized, and newest members of the family have been introduced to the dog with common sense and sensitivity. They love their people and seem to especially relate to teenagers for their sense of fun.

Finally, there is the matter of the corded coat. Some owners chose to keep their Puli clipped down or brushed out, and this is perfectly acceptable. For the person who shows their dog or chooses to cord him, however, a life awaits of stopping traffic and endless questions: What is it? Which end eats? Does the coat do that naturally? How does one wash a Puli? Can the dog see? Does he get hot? Does he have eyes? As we are all ambassadors of our breeds, one must bear this out with patience and good humor. But it does get old.

There are certain caveats when living with such a hairy dog. The owners of fully corded dogs know better than to descend a



A fully corded Puli



Early coat stages aren't always pretty



It's a dog, not a Chrysanthemum

flight of stairs before their dogs do. To “go first” risks being bowled over by a sweep of cords and tumbling down the remaining steps only to land at the bottom under the sheepish grins of their dog. Owners of show dogs also risk stepping on the coat and suffering the nausea of seeing a beautifully formed, 10” long cord now detached from the dog and lying pitifully by itself. So much time is spend grooming and cultivating a show coat that I’ve often joked that the only way to bring a Puli person out of a coma is to put a scratching Puli in the same room, such is our instinct to PROTECT THE COAT.

While the upkeep of a mature corded coat is, perhaps, minimal compared to a Poodle or Bedlington Terrier, establishing the coat in a youngster is another matter. On either side of a Puli’s first birthday, the puppy coat fuses with the top coat forming clumps, or mats. Though there is the odd dog who has a “self cording” coat, most puppy coats in the early stages of matting need the intervention of human fingers to “split” these baseball sized mats into smaller, more manageable ones. With maturity and a little help from the owner who keeps the coat clean and free of debris, the puppy’s coat grows in length and the mats become cords. Grooming a puppy early in the cording process is constant. The natural inclination of the coat is to mat, and it’s typical to have spent an afternoon splitting down coat only to wake up the next day and find that the entire coat has fused into a solid mat. It is at this point that breeders may receive calls from new Puli owners sobbing at the other end of the phone and threatening to shave down the entire dog. It passes.

Maintaining the corded coat successfully comes as a result of keeping it clean, avoiding dead grass and weeds and staying on top of the separation of each cord. Some people knit. Puli people split cords.

The Puli is unique in that if a 6 month old puppy was lined up with an adolescent and a mature Puli in full coat, the average person wouldn’t identify the three as being the same breed.

Devoted “family dog,” jokester, athletic partner, intuitive and intelligent companion, the Puli is a dog for all seasons and all reasons. They are not for everyone, but for the right person, they are the only dog they’ll ever have. ■