Part of the definition of the word "rhapsody" reads "effusively enthusiastic or ecstatic expression." That, say the owners of Pulik, the Hungarian sheepdog, is a perfect description for their breed which is often bubbling with energy. What's more, Pulik are frequently willing to play the clown to entertain their owners. "They are also known 'scoundrels' so there is no shortage of humiliation in store for a Puli owner no matter what sport you choose to do with them," said Dagmar Fertl, who owns Mojo (Ch Piroskai Mojoman Put A Spell On U RN MX MXJ MJB2 OF IT CGC VPA), Gabe (Ch Piroskai Pick Your Poison AX AXJ NF CGC IT VP) and Eve (GCHB Ch PTA Piroskai Original Sin RN CGC IT VP). "But, that said, they are also very bright and good at independent thinking. They are big dogs in a small package so they are quite sturdy and athletic as well as being fast learners. Despite their scoundrel tendencies, they really can be quite biddable. But, they can also be stubborn if they don't see a purpose to what is being requested of them. In a situation like this, you might not get the results you're hoping for and if you push the issue with them, it can result in no success in achieving your goals."

"Pulik are incredibly intelligent, agile and loyal which makes them able to learn quickly and they strive to please their owners. But, they also have one unique ability that makes them successful in almost any dog sport. They were bred to be in charge of large flocks of sheep and that means they are capable of making some decisions based on past experience. It seems strange to say but there have been many times, when presented with a new situation, that my Puli has worked out what must be done without being told by stringing together several things I've taught him in the past," said Julie Schuh who owns Parker (Ch...
Pulik are very agile, very smart and love to do things that please them and their owners. But, when you work with a breed that is very smart, you have to be aware of what the dog truly 'understands' about the activity for which you are training. You also sometimes have to make some accommodations. For example Kerge (CedarRun Kasam Kerge Ivadek BN CD RAE3 HT OA OAJ OF XF SJ SS SG AD FD-HTM FDX-MF) is very fast and I'm a senior handler who is not longer fast so I had to learn distance handling and he had to learn how to respond to distance handling in order for us to be successful in agility,” said Linore Cleveland who also competes in “Dancing Dog” competitions with her Puli.

One issue that has surfaced for Schuh is the breed's sometimes independent attitude. "Pulik are herding dogs and as such, many of them including Parker do not give up control easily. Oh, he will follow commands but he does things his own way. Because of this, we have had some difficulties in obedience. Sometimes he's 'spot on' and other times he apparently feels that he can do it better on his own. We are continuing to work on this problem since he's only 19 months old. One of the ways we're doing this is by incorporating training in the everyday things we do. So, walking down the hall might turn into a tight heel against the wall or fetching something that falls on the floor turns into a take it and give lesson. I've also gotten wonderful feedback, tips and tricks from my fellow competitors who have been doing dog sports much longer than I have. Also, I've been doing conformation with him at the same time as we have been doing other activities and that has created some problems. For example, the full coat needed in the show ring can cause bars to fall in agility so most Pulik in agility have their cords cut down to a more manageable level. In obedience and rally, even though Parker is quite young, I've found I must tie his hair up on his head in order to make good eye contact with him. We also do barn hunting which is a definite challenge with a long coat in all the loose straw and hay.

Another challenge for me is herding. Where I live, we have to travel two to three hours to reach any herding training facilities.”

Fertl has specialized in agility with her Pulik although she has earned titles on them in other disciplines. “Agility is especially challenging as a sport because if just one of you on the team has a bad day or makes a mistake, there’s no qualifying score that day. Also, you can both be perfect and if you get a bad call by a judge there is no Q. This always makes agility exciting and I think it is very addictive for many folks for this reason. But, I've also had to deal with sore shoulders on my dogs from too many bailed A-frames. The physical issues have been helped by acupuncture and chiropractic and by not showing quite as often as some of my fellow agility competitors. I also look for places on agility courses to make the turns safer for the dogs if possible. In addition, I believe that feeding raw and proper conditioning helps prevent some injuries. Still, training for the teeter, weaves and the chute can be a challenge, weaves and the teeter for the obvious problems that many dogs have with these obstacles and the chute because Pulik don't like the fabric dragging across their bodies probably because it can create static electricity. It really sucks to be shocked with you go through...
the fabric. I've seen Pulik sour on an activity for various reasons but I don't think it is unusual for a bright dog to get bored with the sometimes repetitive nature of training. The solutions are numerous. For some, you have to completely give up on an activity. For example, I have a dog that hated being in the show ring and being touched by strangers. So, even though he is a lovely specimen of the breed, once he finished his championship, we didn't go on as a special and instead focused on performance sports that didn't include someone he didn't know approaching him. Pulik are also famous for being 'in tune' with their owners which means it is not unusual for stresses in your life to be picked up by the dog when you are in competition. I have been struggling with this with one of my younger dogs since my mother recently passed away and I moved my dogs into her home. This dog, along with six other Pulik, has had his life turned upside down and it showed. Just about when I was finally about to give up hope for continued success in his agility career, however, things have started to become positive again."

Cleveland said she is an advocate of clicker training and in fact, has been training Kerge since he was about four weeks old. "I am a committed clicker trainer which means that with all my dogs, I establish the clicker as a reward marker and pair it with something the dog considers very rewarding, usually treats but it can be a toy or some form of affection that the dog really enjoys. As a result of using this very positive reinforcement method of training, Kerge really loves to train and he can't wait to go with me to my training center to work. But, one obstacle we have been unable to overcome is that he dislikes retrieving so we have not been able to be successful in advanced obedience work. Besides the clicker I have also used platforms—big in the 'dancing dog' world—to help us achieve a lot of the precision you need particularly in obedience. If the platform is sized to the dog, it lets them figure out where you want them without the need to do any corrections. I have also used panels, the type that can be fastened together so they form a set of panels that can be configured in various ways. I've also used walls to get closeness and straightness and target sticks to help the dog understand fronts, finishes and other behaviors where they have to move around a person. Pulik are capable of doing so many different things and I think it is important to demonstrate the breadth of areas in which a Puli can successfully compete."

Although this is a relatively rare breed, there are some issues facing Puli people. One of these issues is that people are wanting smaller Pulik for activities like agility, according to Fertl. "Like those people who want mini-sized Border Collies for agility, we're now seeing shorter-legged Pulik. These dogs do not have the proper movement for the breed and being built correctly can be pretty important for an agility dog. Also, the breed as a whole has become very coat-heavy with too much emphasis on coat which is not what primarily makes up the breed. The Puli is known as 'moderate' for everything within the standard. This focus on coat can be a hindrance as well for performance sports where sometimes you can have people wanting a full length coat on their dog but expecting them to be able to properly and safely do activities like agility."