

Retriever, Labrador



The Labrador Retriever did not, as his name implies, come from Labrador, but from Newfoundland, although there is no indication of by what means he reached the latter place. However, in 1822 a traveler in that region reported a number of "small water dogs" and said: "The dogs are admirably trained as retrievers in fowling, and are otherwise useful . . . The smooth or short-haired dog is preferred because in frosty weather the long-haired kind become encumbered with ice on coming out of the water."

Early in the 19th century the Earl of Malmesbury reputedly saw one of the dogs that had been carried to England by fishermen and immediately arranged to have some imported. In 1830 the noted British sportsman Colonel Hawker referred to the ordinary Newfoundland and what he called the St. John's breed of water dog, mentioning the former as "very large, strong of limb, rough hair, and carrying his tail high." Referring to what is known now as the Labrador, he said they were "by far the best for any kind of shooting. He is generally black and no bigger than a Pointer, very fine in legs, with short, smooth hair and does not carry his tail so much curled as the other; is extremely quick running, swimming and fighting . . . and their sense of smell is hardly to be credited. . . ."

The dogs were not at first generally known in England as Labradors. In fact,

the origin of the name is shown in a letter written in 1887 by an Earl of Malmesbury in which he said: "We always call mine Labrador dogs, and I have kept the breed as pure as I could from the first I had from Poole, at that time carrying on a brisk trade with Newfoundland. The real breed may be known by its close coat which turns the water off like oil and, above all, a tail like an otter."

The Labrador gradually died out in Newfoundland on account of a heavy dog tax which, with the English quarantine law, practically stopped the importations into England. Thereafter many Labradors were interbred with other types of retrievers. Fortunately, however, the Labrador characteristics predominated. And finally fanciers, desiring to stop the interbreeding, drew up a standard so as to discourage crossing with other retrievers.

There is a stud book of the Duke of Buccleuch's Labrador Retrievers which made it possible to work out pedigrees of the two dogs that did most to produce the modern Labrador, Mr. A. C. Butter's Peter of Faskally, and Major Portal's Flapper. These pedigrees go back as far as 1878.

The Labrador Retriever was first recognized as a separate breed by the English Kennel Club in 1903. The first registration of Labradors by the American Kennel Club was in 1917—Brocklehirst Nell, a Scottish bitch import. From the late 1920s through the 1930s there was a great influx of British dogs (and Scottish retriever trainers) that was to form the backbone of the breed in this country.

In England, no Labrador can become a bench show champion unless he has a working certificate, too—testament that he has also qualified in the field. In America, the Labrador became primarily a retriever trial and shooting dog, but the dual concept of retriever excellence combined with good looks, style and proper type was established early. The fanciers of the 1930s who started the retriever trials—The Labrador Retriever Club (U.S.) was organized in 1931—also exhibited their field dogs at the bench shows with marked success.

The Labrador Retriever's capabilities, fine temperament, and dependability have established it as one of the prime breeds for service as a guide dog for the blind, or for search and rescue work.

Official Standard for the Labrador Retriever

General Appearance—The general appearance of the Labrador should be that of a strongly built, short-coupled, very active dog. He should be fairly wide over the loins, and strong and muscular in the hindquarters. The coat should be close, short, dense and free from feather.

Head—The skull should be wide, giving brain room; there should be a slight stop, *i.e.* the brow should be slightly pronounced, so that the skull is not absolutely in a straight line with the nose. The head should be clean-cut and free from fleshy cheeks. The jaws

should be long and powerful and free from snipiness; the nose should be wide and the nostrils well developed. Teeth should be strong and regular, with a level mouth. The ears should hang moderately close to the head, rather far back, should be set somewhat low and not be large and heavy. The eyes should be of a medium size, expressing great intelligence and good temper, and can be brown, yellow or black, but brown or black is preferred.

Neck and Chest—The neck should be medium length, powerful and not throaty. The shoulders should be long and sloping. The chest must be of good width and depth, the ribs well sprung and the loins wide and strong, stifles well turned, and the hindquarters well developed and of great power.

Legs and Feet—The legs must be straight from the shoulder to ground, and the feet compact with toes well arched, and pads well developed; the hocks should be well bent, and the dog must neither be cowhocked nor be too wide behind; in fact, he must stand and move true all round on legs and feet. Legs should be of medium length, showing good bone and muscle, but not so short as to be out of balance with rest of body. In fact, a dog well balanced in all points is preferable to one with outstanding good qualities and defects.

Tail—The tail is a distinctive feature of the breed; it should be very thick towards the base, gradually tapering towards the tip, of medium length, should be free from any feathering, and should be clothed thickly all round with the Labrador's short, thick, dense coat, thus giving that peculiar "rounded" appearance which has been described as the "otter" tail. The tail may be carried gaily but should not curl over the back.

Coat—The coat is another very distinctive feature; it should be short, very dense and without wave, and should give a fairly hard feeling to the hand.

Color—The colors are black, yellow, or chocolate and are evaluated as follows:

- (a) **Blacks:** All black, with a small white spot on chest permissible. Eyes to be of medium size, expressing intelligence and good temper, preferably brown or hazel, although black or yellow is permissible.
- (b) **Yellows:** Yellows may vary in color from fox-red to light cream with variations in the shading of the coat on ears, the underparts of the dog, or beneath the tail. A small white spot on chest is permissible. Eye coloring and expression should be the same as that of the blacks, with black or dark brown eye rims. The nose should also be black or dark brown, although "fading" to pink in winter weather is not serious. A "Dudley" nose (pink without pigmentation) should be penalized.
- (c) **Chocolates:** Shades ranging from light sedge to chocolate. A small white spot on chest is permissible. Eyes to be light brown to clear yellow. Nose and eye-rim pigmentation dark brown or liver colored. "Fading" to pink in winter weather not serious. "Dudley" nose should be penalized.

Movement—Movement should be free and effortless. The forelegs should be strong, straight and true, and correctly placed. Watching a dog move towards one, there should

be no signs of elbows being out in front, but neatly held to the body with legs not too close together, and moving straight forward without pacing or weaving. Upon viewing the dog from the rear, one should get the impression that the hind legs, which should be well muscled and not cowhocked, move as nearly parallel as possible, with hocks doing their full share of work and flexing well, thus giving the appearance of power and strength.

Approximate Weights of Dogs and Bitches in Working Condition—Dogs—60 to 75 pounds; bitches—55 to 70 pounds.

Height at Shoulders—Dogs—22½ inches to 24½ inches; bitches—21½ inches to 23½ inches.

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