

# A Boy or a Girl?

By Barbara Ellis

Let's face it. Who among us hasn't wished for a dog just like Lassie-friendly, affectionate, gentle, smart, obedient, loyal, brave, and perfectly behaved at all times? But the sexual stereotyping involved here is tricky-after all; the real dog that played Lassie in all those television shows and movies was a male (and trained by a man for that matter). **Dogs of either sex can have the wonderful qualities we all love so much on Lassie, and basing your search for the perfect dog on the sex of that dog alone just doesn't make sense.**

**If you're looking for a dog with a particular temperament-be it friendly and affectionate or driven and ball-crazy-most experts recommend that sex isn't the place to start.** Instead, take time to look deeper, and focus on the individual personality of a dog. According to one MABCR volunteer, "I have known thousands of dogs through my shelter, rescue, fostering, and as pets. I see no distinguishable traits between males and females, except for reproductive behaviors when they are not altered. I think each is as individual as people are and have different personalities. I have found no difference in housebreaking (had both sexes that were good and bad) unless the male is left intact for years and has been allowed to mark territory. Then, it only takes longer to housebreak, but it can be done. I think it is more the breed type and disposition that makes up a dogs' behavior traits." (See <http://www.mabcr.org/housebreaking.htm> for more information on housebreaking)

That said, some generalizations about the personalities of male versus female dogs can be made, but they may surprise dog lovers who assume all females are sweet and compliant. Male dogs tend to be friendlier and more gregarious than females. Males are also much more affectionate, and they do like to cuddle more. They're often easier going and sometimes more eager to please; they really want you to be happy with them.

Female dogs tend to be more aloof, and they are also more focused and businesslike. Girls are indeed "bitchier" and can be tough and bossy. They are more liable to try to work their way up the pack order, and often are more likely to fight than males. The head dog in a pack is most often a bitch for those very reasons.

Keep in mind that even in our own informal survey of MABCR volunteers and their dogs, in some households these generalizations about the personalities of dogs were reversed: Girls were cuddly and sweet, boys more independent and harder to manage. It just goes to show, that starting your search for the perfect dog to add to your family shouldn't start with sex.

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## A Boy or a Girl? (continued)

If you are looking for another dog to add to an existing pack, it is worth considering the sex of potential adoptees, but that's still only after looking at the dog's underlying personality. If you have a dominant female at home, for example, a non-dominant male may be your best choice. Males tend to be more adaptable to getting along in packs, and one female for several males may work best (of course, she will most likely end up ruling the roost!).

## Spaying or Neutering

One thing that does affect temperament and makes a huge difference-for the good-in any dog's behavior and personality is spaying or neutering. (MABCR and other legitimate rescues only offer spayed or neutered dogs for adoption.) Unfortunately, many of the myths that scare people away from the sweet, cuddly boys neglect to differentiate between neutered and un-neutered individuals. While un-neutered males may wander after females, fight, or be aggressive with other male dogs, these are much less likely to be problems with neutered males, who are much more likely to roll with the punches, back away, and let someone else set the rules (remember your history lessons and the Roman eunuchs? There was a reason they were the caretakers).

**Dominance-related behaviors like marking in the house also are greatly reduced by neutering. However, whether the dog is neutered or not, marking in the house is a housebreaking issue, not a function of the dog's inherent temperament or reproductive status.** Give your dog a housebreaking refresher course if this behavior is a problem.

Despite all the stories, spaying or neutering a dog also doesn't cause any negative side effects. For example, spayed females don't automatically get fat. (If your dog gets fat, you're feeding it too much or not giving it enough exercise. Sound familiar?) Spaying or neutering also doesn't make a dog get lazy, lose its drive, or become less protective. It only prevents unwanted litters and more dogs in shelters and rescues. Spaying or neutering a dog protects it against some types of cancer and other illnesses as well (pyrometria and false pregnancy for example).

## In Conclusion

So, whether you're looking for the myth or the real-life animal actor, you can find Lassie. **When you're looking for a new dog don't restrict your search to only the female dogs. Any dog can be hyper and dominant, mellow and flexible, or passive and submissive. Just take time to look at the dog, not what sex it is.**

Barbara Ellis has shared her home and her life with seven dogs-six males who are/were gentle, wild, crazy, fun, obedient, affectionate, energetic, and sweet, along with a wonderful, driven, dominant female. She has loved them all.