

## **Battle of the Sezes: Male vs Female Dogs**

**Reference:** Adapted from an article by Patricia Peters

The phone rings and the voice on the other end says "I'm looking for a Labrador as a pet. It has to be a female because they are more affectionate and easier to housebreak." A thousand times I've heard it, and a thousand times I've countered the false image in favor of males as pets.

I don't pretend to make assumptions about every breed. My experience has been primarily with Labrador Retrievers. After sharing my heart and home with them for over 25 years, I try very hard to convince prospective puppy buyers to consider individuals regardless of sex. The personality of each puppy is more important than his or her plumbing. Dominance or lack of it, sociability, or trainability are seldom specifically linked to sexuality.

An added factor to consider is neutering. The vast majority of pet bitches are spayed between six months and a year, and more owners of pet males are coming to realize that castration at seven or eight months eliminates some of the less desirable characteristics of adult males without altering that part of their personality that makes them loving and mischievous pets. Neutering of both sexes is a good idea in the majority of cases.

Over the years, I have observed both sexes in individual and group situations, and in home and kennel environments. Based on these observations, I would like to share some ideas about male vs. female Labradors as companions.

### **The Girls**

First, on the distaff side, I have found the bitches to be more independent. They can be, and often are, very affectionate; but it is usually on their terms. They tend to be a bit calculating and more self-serving. There is a reason they are called bitches, and a reason that the term has the connotation that it does. Their challenges to your authority tend to be more subtle and indirect than those of most males. They can be amusing and charming companions. Recognize that part of their charm is their unpredictability. Be aware of their efforts to "train" a household to serve their every whim. You had better decide while she is quite young how far your puppy princess can take her little game, or you may find your heart and home under the power of her determined and dictatorial paw. Her efforts to usurp power tend to last a lifetime, so arm yourself against the onslaught of her feminine wiles! An interesting note: I have found men to be more susceptible to a bitch's con-game. Perhaps females of both species recognize in each other the power play for domination, and are not as easily taken in.

Unspayed bitches in heat often forget everything they ever learned about appropriate behavior. Things like housebreaking or coming when called are farthest from their minds. Even if they aren't bred, false pregnancies after lead to bizarre behavior of up to three months following their heat cycle. In other words, unless you have a very good reason for breeding your pet bitch, have her spayed for everyone's peace of mind.

### **The Boys**

Now let's look at the other side of the coin and consider the male. I find the boys much more open and direct in their approach to people and to life in general. Once you have won their loyalty and affection, it is yours forever. However, there is one hitch to this idyllic picture. As complex and ongoing as the power struggle tends to be with the girls, its opposite is more often

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true of males. The effort to take over as pack leader is usually tied in with budding maturity between five and twelve months. It is crucial that your little macho man not be allowed to take over or gain dominance in area of daily living. This does not mean that he must be reduced to trembling subservience. It does mean that when push comes to shove, you call the shots--every time.

Aggressive dominance in either sex during this time frame must be dealt with swiftly so there is no question in the puppy's mind about who is the boss. "Kindergarten" obedience training works especially well with males at this stage because they really want to please you, and it helps establish a good working relationship. Lots of lavish praise and decisive corrections give him a sense of self-confidence and direction that will make him an ideal companion. Conversely, obedience training at an early age is effective for bitches too, because they haven't matured and perfected the tricks of their trade. They tend to be more flexible and amenable to direction, and it give you a head start!

Neutering males is not a substitute for training, or will it turn a dictator into a pussycat. It is most effective when it is done at about seven months of age in conjunction with training, etc. It does tend to diminish a male's desire to "mark" territory by urinating in inappropriate places. He will be less aggressive, especially toward other dogs, and he will be less inclined to seek out that fascinating little lady down the street. He won't be so easily distracted, especially in the company of other dogs, making training a bit simpler.

Certain personality traits show up at an early age. It is important that breeders learn to recognize these characteristics and try to match puppies to the appropriate situation. It is equally important that prospective buyers not get bound up by preconceived ideas about a standard formula for "the perfect pet."

Look at puppies with a critical eye and an open mind. Male or female, be prepared to put a lot of time and effort into raising a love, amusing and at least passably obedient companion that will be a credit to you and the breed.