

Pros and Cons of Owning a Flat-Coated Retriever

By Sally J. Terroux (reprinted with permission)

The Flat-Coated Retriever is extremely versatile as a hunting-flushing retriever and a responsive family companion. As a pet, the Flat-Coat is an active dog who adapts well to city life, but requires considerable daily exercise and activity with family members. In that respect, the Flat-Coat is a high maintenance dog.

The typical Flat-Coat feels more "worthwhile" and expects to be admired when he is carrying something (anything) in his mouth. He enjoys playing in water, but is basically clean and requires only weekly brushing. He barks at strangers in the distance, but needs to be trained not to jump joyfully on your guests. He is good natured and loves to play with children, but usually needs training to play more gently with toddlers. His natural instincts are strong and he likes to dig and chew, but usually not to excess. He is a bright dog whose intelligence can get him into trouble if not channeled in the right direction. He is a happy dog who keeps his youthful outlook on life into old age.

In the field the Flat-Coat is birdy and usually responsive, but he can be headstrong because of enthusiasm, birdiness or enjoyment of the run. He is very versatile and adaptable and at his best when challenged the most.

Slow to mature (3 years or more), early puppy play training is encouraged, and good manners can be strictly enforced, but formal training should be kept brief, cheerful and enthusiastic. Flat-Coats are bright, catch on quickly and are easily bored. Bad habits should be prevented through a combination of personal supervision and confinement, combined with adequate exercise and attention.

The gene pool is quite small since the breed almost died out in Great Britain during World War II. Breeders have experienced some problems with the patella joint, hip dysplasia and cancer. Breeding stock should be selected and bred only with great care and knowledge. The Flat-Coated Retriever Society of America encourages breeding for the original purpose of the breed (the hunting retriever) in order to preserve its hardiness, longevity and temperament.

The Flat-Coat is a charming dog to live with and can be trained to excel in a wide variety of activities, but he does absolutely require and appreciate close interaction with members of his family.