

## Surprise, Surprise – These Highly Regarded Dogs Can Be a Royal Pain to Live With

Everyone seems to crave one of these canine gems today. But be careful what you wish for, or you could be in for a big surprise. They can be a nuisance, get bored and restless, and cause you a lot of trouble you weren't prepared for. Remember — Not all that glitters is gold.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Researchers have become very interested in studying the canine brain, and many dog owners these days are wondering how smart their own pet is
- Most people consider dogs who are consistently obedient to be smart, however, others believe independent-minded dogs are more intelligent
- Some researchers suspect that dogs' affection for their owners, not their intelligence, may be the quality that truly sets them apart from other animals
- The Border Collie is widely viewed as the smartest dog breed; in the small dog category, the Pembroke Welsh Corgi tops the list
- It's important to note that smart dogs can be a special challenge to care for precisely because they're smart

**Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 19, 2018.**

If you're a dog parent, you've probably noticed the canine brain is a popular research topic these days. It seems there are always several studies underway here in the U.S. and around the globe to investigate how dogs think, what they think about, whether they feel the same emotions we do, and much more.

As Jan Hoffman, writing for The New York Times, observes, "Canine cognition research is underway on campuses from Berkeley to Barnard, and at universities in England, Hungary and Japan. The field's growth has coincided with a shift in how dog owners view their animals."<sup>1</sup>

As a natural consequence of a growing scientific focus on the intelligence of dogs, more and more pet owners are wondering how smart their own canine companions are.

*"Suddenly how smart your dog is seems to matter — an aspiration that has also not gone unnoticed by the commercial pet industry," says Hoffman. "Walk into any pet supply chain, such as the aptly named PetSmart, and take in the toys, gadgets and foods advertised as optimizing a dog's intelligence. Or just do an online search for 'brain games to play with your dog.'"*

## What Makes a Dog Smart?

The characteristics that make a dog smart are subject to interpretation. Some pet parents feel an obedient dog is smart, while others believe a dog with a mind of her own is more intelligent. However, **friendly and compliant dogs** are considered smart by most human standards.

Dogs bred to be more independent and less eager to please aren't dumb, but they do often require more patience when it comes to learning and following commands. "Here's a bubble-bursting secret: Smart dogs often aren't that great to live with, precisely because they're too smart," writes Hoffman. Generally speaking, humans assign canine smarts to dogs who:

- Quickly learn and consistently obey commands
- Perform their sport, task or job consistently well
- Are willing and able to learn human-type stuff

Interestingly, researchers define and measure a dog's intelligence differently from the way owners do. In fact, according to Clive D. L. Wynne, Ph.D., a psychology professor and director of the Canine Science Collaboratory at Arizona State University, "Smart dogs are often a nuisance. They get restless, bored and create trouble."<sup>2</sup> Wynne and other researchers suspect intelligence may not be the quality that truly sets dogs apart from other animals, at least when it comes to their interaction with humans.

*"There is something remarkable about dogs," Wynne observes. "They have this kind of open hyper-sociability. The dog itself wants to give out love. I think 'smarts' is a red herring. What we really need in our dogs is affection."*

## How Smart Is the World's Smartest Dog?

Wynne's "red herring" theory was put to the test with a genuine canine Einstein. Brian Hare, Ph.D., of Duke University's Canine Cognition Center developed the Dognition website, which asks each online participant to play games (created by scientists, trainers and behaviorists) with their dog. Hare believes dogs, like humans, have multiple types of intelligence. Dognition assesses a dog's empathy, communication, cunning, memory and reasoning.

One of the dogs for which an assessment was completed is a very famous 12-year-old Border Collie named Chaser. Chaser is able to identify over 1,000 objects, can distinguish between nouns and verbs, and is considered to be the smartest dog in the world. Chaser's Dognition results were fascinating.

*"Researchers placed 10 items that Chaser could already identify in a pile with an unfamiliar one," writes Hoffman. "Then they asked her to fetch the one that she had not yet learned. She did so correctly because she inferred it was the only object she did not recognize, researchers said. A week later, when asked to retrieve the same item, Chaser remembered."*

In the areas of inference and memory, Chaser scored "off the charts" according to Hare. However, in the areas of empathy and communication — characteristics that pet owners dearly love about their dogs — Chaser's results were "totally uninteresting," says Hare. Laurie Santos, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Yale and director of the university's Canine Cognition Center, agrees with Hare that dogs have multiple types of intelligence.

*"If you want to train an agility dog or a show dog, you value certain traits," she says. "And if you have a stressful job and a family, you want a companion to cuddle. But they're both 'smart.'"*

## 10 Smartest Breeds for Obedience and Working Intelligence

According to rankings by experts who study the subject (specifically, Stanley Coren, author of "The Intelligence of Dogs"), the 10 most intelligent dog breeds are:<sup>3</sup>

- **No. 1** — Border Collie
- **No. 2** — Poodle
- **No. 3** — German Shepherd
- **No. 4** — Golden Retriever
- **No. 5** — Doberman Pinscher
- **No. 6** — Shetland Sheepdog
- **No. 7** — Labrador Retriever
- **No. 8** — Papillon
- **No. 9** — Rottweiler
- **No. 10** — Australian Cattle Dog

This list is probably no surprise to most dog lovers — even those of you with breeds not on the list who happen to think your dog is super smart. The list has been around for years and the dogs that made the list are very well-known, popular breeds with much greater exposure in general than many other breeds.

### Small-to-Medium Size Smart Dogs

Several of the dogs on the above list are a pretty good size. Smaller breeds known for their obedience and working intelligence include:

- **No. 1** — Pembroke Welsh Corgi
- **No. 2** — Miniature Schnauzer
- **No. 3** — Schipperke
- **No. 4** — Cocker Spaniel
- **No. 5** — Pomeranian
- **No. 6** — Cardigan Welsh Corgi
- **No. 7** — Yorkshire Terrier
- **No. 8** — Border Terrier
- **No. 9** — Australian Terrier
- **No. 10** — Cairn Terrier

If you're considering adding a canine smarty-pants to the family but don't have the space for a large dog, one of these smaller breeds/breed mixes might fit the bill.

## Remember — Smart Dogs Can Be a Challenge

Regardless of the breed, owning a smart dog can be challenging. If you assume breeds known for their intelligence are easier to care for than other dogs, you could be barking up the wrong tree. It's important to understand that most smart dogs don't do well without plenty of physical and mental stimulation — with "plenty" meaning an absolute minimum of one hour of intense physical activity every single day plus mental enrichment throughout the day.

Having canine smarts doesn't mean these dogs understand when they're left home all day alone with nothing to do. Or when you're too tired to take them out for some exercise.

If your **smart, healthy dog is under-exercised, lonely and bored** by 10:00 a.m. and you won't be home till evening, don't expect him to reason the whole thing out and decide to wait quietly by the door for your return. Chances are there will be things out of place by the time you get home. Hopefully that won't include the stuffing in your upholstered furniture — but it might.

Just as parents need to keep active, inquisitive kids challenged and busy to avoid problems stemming from boredom and too much unsupervised time on their hands, owners of bright dogs should do the same.

### Sources and References

<sup>1, 2</sup> [The New York Times January 7, 2017](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Wikipedia](#)

---