

The ideal Pyrenean is an extraordinary animal. On the one hand he is a territorial guard dog, ready to defend aggressively the lives of his charges and the ground that he sees as his. On the other hand, he is a patient guardian, gentle with his human & animal family, calm and self confident, distant and discriminating with strangers. In order to maintain the delicate balance that makes the Pyr probably the best natural guard dog/pet in the canine world, breeders must exercise rigorous judgment and ruthless selection,

It seems to me that we are beginning to slip into some very serious temperamental aberrations in the breed and if we don't recognize them and deal with them now, in a very few years our beautiful breed will be in deep trouble. Shy dogs have always existed in this breed, but the willingness to tolerate them is increasing. So we are seeing more and more of them. Genetically, shyness exists in almost every line. Even two stable parents can produce a shy dog, but to deliberately perpetuate it by breeding a seriously shy dog is dangerous and to breed two of them to each other borders on criminal.

There is something so unPyrenean about the dog that tucks his tail or runs from people. The true Pyrenean stands his ground with alert but disinterested confidence, neither afraid nor submissive. However, the real danger that underlies shyness is the fear-biter complex. Since a Pyr is a guard dog and basically aggressive, if he does not have a truly calm and stable nature, his fear may translate itself into overt aggression. It is a case of "the best defense is a good offense". The dog is really frightened but he feels that if he attacks what frightens him, he can drive it off before it gets him. This is not true guard dog aggressiveness and must not be confused with that. The truly stable Pyr does not bite people except under the most extreme circumstances and he never bites any member of the family unless he is in intolerable pain. It is possible that a stable Pyr may bite a stranger who intrudes on his territory and does not heed the warning bark or growl. He will not do this in the presence of his owner unless the owner is directly threatened.

I have been horrified lately to hear of Pyrs who have bitten people coming to their houses as guests. But even more horrified to hear that their breeders excuse this behavior by saying, "Well, they are guard dogs." NO--NO--NO !! An animal as large and strong as a Pyr who bites under these circumstances is DANGEROUS. I believe honestly and without

exceptions that such animals must be destroyed.

So, how does the true Pyrenean act toward strangers on his property? Watchful, reserved and calm is how I see them. If the owner greets the visitor in an amiable, non-frightened way, the Pyr accepts the people on his territory without threatening them. He may eventually be overly friendly, or he may not, but he is never openly hostile. If a family member comes into the darkened house under any circumstances, the dog is glad to see him.

None but the most greedy and unconcerned breeder (and apparently they do exist) will be off hand about the dog that bites. However, it is easier to forgive the initial manifestation that leads to the biter-the shy dog. I don't know that I would go so far as to say that no dog who shows any lack of confidence should ever be bred. Sometimes the overall virtues of the animal may justify a breeding. But, anyone who does so must select the other individual with great care and then observe the pups closely and be alert to problems. We must be willing to recognize that temperament is largely hereditary and not burden well meaning owners with the responsibility of having created these unstable animals. We cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility by blaming someone else.

If we want to recognize the problems we must be alert. The dog who seems OK while on lead in the ring, but barks and lunges at all passers-by when put in a crate, has a screw loose. If you have to cover a crate to keep a dog quiet or prevent it from displays of hysteria and aggression there is something wrong with the dog. Pyrs who growl or lunge at people while on lead, off their property are unstable and an anathema.

Calm and alert, that is real Pyrenean temperament. One of the potential problems is that so often Pyrs with this temperament are not really showy. Natural showmanship is a rare commodity in this breed. A shortcut to this is through the high-strung, over active, slightly nervous dog. Boy, are they showy but instability is always lurking under the surface. And as family house pets, they are guaranteed to drive any buyer crazy.

If the rarified world of the showing it is easy to pretend that temperaments are not important. As long as the dog doesn't attack the judge or try to run out of the ring, it is easy to ignore. We forgive the dog who has to be held firmly

to be approached and we are unconcerned about the dog who runs with ears pulled back and tail tucked down. What do we do about the judges (even breeder judges) who will put up dogs who exhibit these aberrations? All truly stable Pyrs should be approachable on a loose lead--no dog should have to be held in a death grip to be touched. I would like to offer as a beginning, the proposal that we amend our standard to read, as does the Dobe:

The judge shall dismiss from the ring any shy or vicious Doberman.

SHYNESS--A dog shall be judged fundamentally shy if, refusing to stand for examination, it shrinks away from the judge; if it fears an approach from the rear; if it shies at sudden and unusual noises to a marked degree.

VISCIOUSNESS--A dog that attacks or attempts to attack either the judge or its handler, is definitely vicious. An aggressive or belligerent attitude towards other dogs shall not be deemed viciousness.

It is my belief that this clear statement in their standard has been in great measure responsible for the extraordinary stability of the Dobe. Surely we could do no less to protect the temperamental future of our breed.

We can amend the standard and we can try to educate judges, both of which I believe are imperative if we want to avert catastrophe. However, in the end, it becomes a matter of personal responsibility for each of us.

First we need to learn what a true Pyrenean temperament really is; not accept our own dogs as correct because they are what we are used to. Then we need to be absolutely honest with ourselves about what we see, not ignore or excuse anything. We must be willing to discard those dogs that we know are over the tolerance line, no matter how wonderful they may be otherwise. When we breed any dog that we know is borderline we must do so with open eyes, alert for the potential problem. In some cases this may mean holding on to some or all of the pups until we are confident of their stability. We must further be willing to stand behind those pups, replacing those that go bad if need be. And if, in the end, our borderline risk passes on those temperamental abnormalities, we must have the courage to abandon that individual. Even more difficult, we must be willing to give up those outwardly stable dogs who produce a preponderance of shyness and aggressive instability.

We must take responsibility for the temperaments of the dogs we breed. The time is long since past that we can pretend that temperament is largely a matter of how a dog is raised and that we, as breeders, bear no responsibility for those terrified or biting

animals that we have produced. There is no doubt that mis-management can accentuate the temperamental patterns that are inborn, but no really stable Pyr is going to be turned into a terrified, cringing animal or an hysterical, biting one because it was not taken out of the house when it was young. The most ideally stable dog we ever owned lived the first four years of her life before she came to us, in virtual isolation in a small run with minimal human contact. The buck stops with us and we can no longer close our eyes to that fact if we truly love this breed.

When we sit down to choose a mate for our beautiful bitch, along with front, rear, pigment, coat, we must write large the word TEMPERAMENT. The most beautiful eyes, the most magnificent coat will not make a true Pyrenean out of a flaky and timid animal. No degree of perfect soundness or exemplary type can be used to excuse the existence, let alone the breeding, of a Pyr that bites a guest or tuns on his owners. That is not a "guard dog", that is a maniac.

Long after we have left the exciting, challenging, artificial world of dog shows, the descendants of our canine stars will be occupying the homes of average families and patrolling the pastures of busy ranchers. It will not matter then if International Champion Superstar had 100 Bests In Show. What will matter is that he had a true, stable Pyrenean temperament.

by Linda Weisser

