

The Great Irish Wolfhound, where are you?

As a young man living and working in Norfolk, rural England, I was employed by the Royal Mail service. I would deliver packages throughout the county and was lucky enough to be able to explore the back ways and many farms hidden in the countryside.

On one particular day, no rain I hasten to add, I was at a remote farm house. I was greeted by a rather small canine which I gingerly stepped around for fear of me crushing it. The dog however was desperately lunging for the back of my ankles, being six foot tall and approaching 200lbs fearlessly I ventured on. The farm, like so many in this area had no number, mail box or door bell on the front door, so to complete the task of delivering the package I would have to venture to the back of the property to find either another door or even the owner.

With certain unease I proceeded, normally where there is a small dog with attitude there comes a larger dog as back up. I had been chased off a few farms before I knew the risk I was taking. With pee-wee in tow, not quite attached to my ankle but getting closer, I managed to find the door and produced a grand knock to arise the occupants.

The sight that was suddenly before me in the adjoining bay window was awesome. Two enormous Irish Wolfhounds stood barking their greeting through the glass. I was half expecting these great beasts to burst through the puny barrier and get to work on me, but to my relief, the window held. I was equally surprised when the door was flung wide open with no care or thought to the terrified being the other side, i.e. me.

There I was face to face, really, with the two most beautiful dogs I had ever seen. Majestic, huge, powerful, these dogs looked like they could run all day and not even break into a pant, no need for me to run. Of course the dogs were wonderful and showed they were happy to see me. I soon relaxed into petting them and conversing with the owner, who by now had received her parcel. In just those few moments with these dogs it was obvious to me that they were indeed a special breed, different from all the other dogs I had met before. They stood proud, strong and tall, very tall with long legs and a highly defined tuck, much like the greyhound, but with a coat that added to their majesty.

With all this going on I had forgotten Pee-Wee, which I had been keeping a watchful eye on and just as the two wolfhounds retreated back into the farm house Pee-Wee launched his vicious attack to my right ankle. Yes, it hurt a bit but I shook him off and dashed to the safety of my Van, I had no intention of being Pee-Wee's next meal, even though it would have probably taken him a few months to actually eat me.

A few years later I found myself in a position to actually have an Irish Wolfhound I was in fact living in North America. My wife and I researched breeders and more into the breed and decided on a male, Balin. (Sunstag Wolfbane). His first day home was a little stressful for him, and he cried all night, so by 2am he was in the bedroom snuggling down, and from that point on he was *really* home. Within four months we had another wolfhound, this time a female, Kili (Cridhe Cu Galadriel) and now nine years on we have six adults.

Our decision on breeder and the look of our dog was largely due to the memory of the two dogs I met in England, as well as the physical qualities and awesome temperament attributed to this breed; we are very pleased with our choice and they are wonderful dogs. I consider our dogs all that I think the breed should possess, tall, fit, and powerful with the ability to run at speed and retain stamina and strength enough to kill a wolf.

I am now a little concerned with the current trend in breeding where many of these attributes are being lost. If this is a conscious decision then I am even more troubled, but it seems that some dogs, although large in weight, would not be able to catch a wolf. The athlete that these dogs were, and should still be, is being bred out and a shorter but heavier dog is emerging, more mastiff shaped than grey-hound like.

Quotes and passages of text, as well as the occasional painting are all we really have to go on with these hounds so not too much help there. But that being said, at least we have something to go by. For centuries, the description of size and shape have not changed. Why are we changing now? **The Great Irish Wolfhound, where are you???**

Quotes:

1697 quote "*The greatest dog I have yet seen, surpassing in size even the Molossus, as regards shape of body and general character similar in all respects to the common Greyhound; their use is to catch wolves.*" <http://www.answers.com/topic/molossus-dog>

1772 quote "*These dogs are about three feet high, generally of a white or cinnamon color, and made somewhat like a Greyhound but more robust*"

1887 quote "*All the testimony which comes down to us agrees as to his sagacity, courage, strength, speed, and size. On his size there is a difference of opinion. Allowing that he attained a height of from thirty-two to thirty-five inches, he is taller than any breed now living, yet the early accounts of him state he was from three to four feet high.*"

So these dogs that we are basing the modern hound on were, fast, powerful, much like the greyhound but more robust and stood anywhere from thirty two inches to forty plus inches to the shoulder.

It really is obvious to me that the modern hound **should be bred** to achieve these characteristics. I may be wrong in some people's eyes but maybe that has something to do with the fact that their dog has trouble getting up, let alone run after and catch a wolf. While this breed no longer hunts wolves, (they did too good a job in Ireland, resulting in the extinction of the wolf) changing these characteristics is creating a different breed.

Other than the characteristics of the breed we also have a responsibility to ensure the longevity of the breed and the lives of the individual hound. If the breeder can boast long life in their hounds then they must be doing something right. It will be interesting to see if the average life of the North American Irish Wolfhound increases or decreases over time. I am aware that the life spans have increased over the past 30 years from 5 to about 8, but this is mostly due to the enlightened understanding of the necessity for life-long exercise and the importance of a good diet.

I really wonder sometimes that if a Time Machine was indeed a reality and I went back in time and "Borrowed" a wolfhound from the 1200's AD for example, how well would that dog be received in today's show rings? My guess would be that it probably would not be placed because it would not resemble the modern wolfhound that is winning shows today here in North America. So..... where is this need to make changes coming from? Is it a misinterpretation of the breed standard? **The Great Irish Wolfhound, where are you?** In my eyes, he stands below.....

Indi – Santir Pride of Scotland of Bribiba from Bribiba Irish Wolfhounds, Scotland



18 months



3 years

Written by Jonathan Cullum (photos courtesy of Bribiba Irish Wolfhounds)

Wolfhound Personalities

Wolfhounds are as varied as humans when it comes to personalities. The best and most typical are extremely intelligent, quick learners, and have surprising memories. Sensitive to their humans' moods and wishes, attentive and observant. They have a generous spirit with outwardly infinite patience with both young and old.

Despite their commanding appearance, they have a 'sixth' sense about where their feet are landing, and who or what is behind them, enabling them to move through crowded rooms or negotiate a whelping box of crawling puppies without injury or upset.

Wolfhounds are very stoic when sick or injured, and will calmly endure painful veterinary procedures as if they understand what is happening will help them recover. These hounds are affectionate with family and friends, courteous and friendly to new contacts until they get acquainted. When you are calm and tranquil, the ideal wolfhound will be the same, they will keep you company without intrusion, and will loyally follow you from room to room as you move around the house. And will travel with you to work each day and peacefully sleep under your desk. But as soon as you mention the word walk, they will be ready to go and full of energy, giving you endless pleasure as you watch your hound galloping and playing.

To me, the least typical and most unattractive kind of personality to be found in a Wolfhounds is the insensitive, hyperactive extrovert without any ability to think, or to learn from experience, or to foresee the consequences of his or her behavior (usually his). This hound will be everyone's friend and would happily get into a strangers car and leave you forever. They can knock over children or small animals, not from any malice but because they are clueless.

Some can actually smile, our Kili is a smiler. It is inherited and gets passed down through families as we have seen with Kili's offspring, and seems to be dependant of a pair of facial muscles or possibly nerves to operate them. The smile can look like a snarl, but it is a totally different facial expression. The lips pull backwards and upwards and will show some or all of the teeth. This to me is a wonderful sight, and our girl Kili knows exactly what a smile means and greets us with a huge one everyday or if you smile at her. The smile is used for greeting their favorite humans, Kili will also use this as an apology when she knows she has been naughty. Trust me, it's hard to be cross with a hound who is smiling at you with such intensity.

Generally they do not bark much, maybe just to let you know the mail man has arrived, however there are always exceptions, we have one who is fairly noisy and will bark with little provocation.

Whatever the basic personality of your puppy, the way in which you bring up your Wolfhound and the experiences along the way will have a very strong effect on the final character of your hound. I know of no other breed where a dogs character can be so markedly affected by the way the dog is reared. Only Wolfhounds seem to need almost the same kind of rearing and education as a child. This means no-one should have a Wolfhound unless they are prepared to devote time and thought into rearing them in the correct way. So think long and hard about whether a Wolfhound is the right dog for you and your family, after all when you get a dog it should be for the rest of his or her life.

Helen Cullum

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