

# LIFE'S JUST BETTER WITH A DOG

LET US COUNT THE WAYS



No. 1

## We Were Meant for Each Other

**Humans and dogs have been relying on one another for more than 30,000 years. Here's how it all began.**

by **BRONWEN DICKEY**

**I**F YOU EVER WANT TO BE humbled by the strange and improbable arc of human history, just take a look at your dog. Pound for pound, it is a much stronger, faster, and more efficient killer than you are. (Yes, even your goldendoodle.) At the top of its game, a dog can run down prey over long distances while maintaining a speed of 25 miles per hour. (The average marathon runner tops out at half that pace.) A dog can detect scents as subtle as a spoonful of sugar dissolved in enough water to fill two Olympic-size swimming pools. To top it off, its teeth are practically armored, with enamel crosshatched like ballistic nylon, making them capable of snapping bones and gnawing them to the marrow.

All we have are hands. And brains, of course. Large brains, complex brains, but brains that light up like the Vegas skyline when we're frightened, which tends to happen a lot when we encounter anything with large, bone-snapping jaws. That our highly risk-averse species, which spent millions of years either killing or fleeing animals with sharp teeth, yoked its fate so completely to a creature as formidable as the dog makes no sense at all, at least in terms of self-preservation. Nowhere else in nature do two predators consistently work together, let alone share a destiny. But casting our lot with the dog's ancestors was the best decision humans ever made. Without

photograph by  
**PETER AMEND**



them, we might not be here in the first place.

While we know that the dog was the first animal to be domesticated, exactly where and how this happened is still a matter of debate. Fortunately, fossil records give us a range of clues. The oldest-known human footprints, stamped in the earth roughly 26,000 years ago inside the Chauvet Cave in southern France, belonged to a child. What's right beside them? The prints of a large canid — maybe not quite a dog yet, but an animal on its way to becoming one. DNA analysis of canid fossils found in Siberia point even further back, to about 35,000 years ago, when ancient wolves roamed much of what is now Asia and Europe, bringing them into regular contact with nomadic hunter-gatherers. These fossils weren't wolves, however. Their snouts were shorter, and their genes had taken a detour. They were most definitely dogs.

Until recently, there were two competing theories about how this change occurred. The first — which posits that a number of clever *Homo sapiens* either found orphaned wolf cubs or snatched them from their dens and tamed them — gives people all the credit. The second — which suggests that wolves lurked around human camps, scavenging on refuse and essentially taming themselves — attributes it to the canid.

Neither scenario makes solid sense. Even in the strictest laboratory conditions, tweaking the behavior of any animal via selective breeding is a slow, arduous process, and there are always more misses than hits. Just ask the Russian geneticists who have been attempting to domesticate silver foxes since 1959. They've had a great deal of success, but the process still isn't complete, and they started with a captive, rather than a wild, population. How likely is it that our ancestors, whose lives were the epitome of "nasty, brutish and short," would share their dinners with animals that could easily kill them? They sure



## NOWHERE ELSE IN NATURE DO TWO PREDATORS CONSISTENTLY WORK TOGETHER, LET ALONE SHARE A DESTINY.

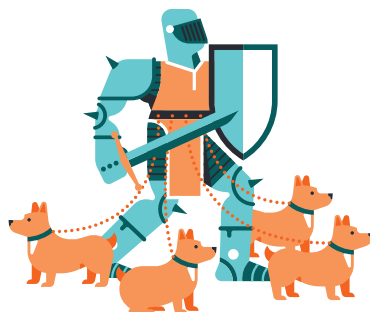
didn't try it with jackals or hyenas.

That leaves us with the self-domestication theory: that friendlier wolves hit the evolutionary jackpot by dumpster-diving outside human settlements. The problem here is that human camps wouldn't become permanent for 20,000 years after the first dogs appeared. Would early nomads have allowed a hungry pack of predators to follow them from camp to camp without, at some point, busting out the stones and spears?

In the past decade or so, many scientists have settled on a third, more likely, possibility: that, in different locations and at different times, it was always a little of both. Some humans tamed wolves while other wolves allowed themselves to be tamed. Each interaction was different, but together, over time, they added up. The arrangement worked out better than it should have because both of our species rely on tightly knit social groups, cooperation, and communication to survive. We also seem to share a biological predisposition to travel long distances. And both the human and the canine brain seem to experience a runner's high after exercise. It was only natural, then, that these in-between creatures, these "proto-dogs," helped us hunt and that we

kept them fed, the balance of power shifting back and forth in a continuous loop.

After many generations of this evolutionary two-step, the progenitors of today's gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) had morphed into a new subspecies (*Canis lupus familiaris*) that no longer fled from us but actively sought us out. It watched, listened, and learned from us in ways we are only just beginning to decipher. Did you know, for example, that when your dog looks at you, it is tracking the movement of your eyes? Or that dogs far surpass even chimps when it comes to understanding certain human gestures, like pointing? After so many years traveling alongside us, our canine companions are





literally wired for human cooperation. Because of this, dogs steadily expanded across the globe, wherever man roamed, while wolf populations dwindled.

Even more remarkable, however, is that dogs defended us, even from other members of its own kind. It was only when our settlements were safe from marauding outsiders that finally, after thousands of years wandering the planet, we put down stakes and began to build. Once anchored, we learned to plant and farm and write. And then, well, the speed with which we took over the planet was unprecedented.

In other words, humans didn't yank dogs toward civilization; we staggered toward it together. Were it not for the protection and partnership dogs provided us, civilization might not have been possible.

For the past two centuries, we've managed to wring some of the wonder out of this dynamic process by focusing not on the marvel of the dog itself but on our control over it. Victorian dog breeders, in particular, fussed over its shape as a way of projecting their own vanity onto nature. The first half of the 20th century was devoted to portraying dogs as a dumbed-down servant in a dominance hierarchy of alphas and betas, a model that has been roundly debunked by behavioral science. Dogs, it turns out, aren't constantly fighting to be "pack leader." Their social groups are nearly as flexible as ours, if not more so.

Fortunately, a relatively new crop of researchers at places like the Family Dog Project in Hungary and the Canine Cognition Center at Duke University are studying all the parts of the human-canine bond that have withstood thousands of years of global turmoil, and their conclusions are pretty clear. The dog is no more a dumbed-down wolf than a human is a "dumbed-down" chimp. What each of our species lacks in brute strength, it makes up for in finely tuned problem-solving skills, one of which is our ability to work with other creatures and learn from them.

The writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, "You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed." But you also owe a debt of gratitude to that which tamed you. Thanks to the dog, there's still a little wildness left in all of us.

## 2 | They Help You Chill

"Petting and playing with dogs lowers blood pressure and heart rate almost immediately," says Hal Herzog, an anthrozoologist and psychology professor at Western Carolina University. These benefits may add up to long-term protection: Some studies show that dog owners have lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and obesity risk than people without them. Even a brief interaction with a dog can ease anxiety and boost mood, finds a new Yale study. "A dog may change your perception of a stressor," says lead researcher Molly Crossman. "You come home after a bad day, your dog runs up so happy to see you, and suddenly you think, 'You know what? I can do this.'" —MELAINA JUNTTI

No. 3

## One Might Save Your Life

➔ IN JUNE 2014, Joseph Phillips-Garcia, 16, was driving with his aunt, cousin, and his four-year-old king shepherd, named Sako, when the car careered off a road in British Columbia. Phillips-Garcia was thrown from the vehicle, breaking a collarbone and femur. Sako, the only other survivor, kept the teen warm by cuddling with him. That night, coyotes appeared and Sako chased them off. "You could hear them fighting and the bushes rumbling around," Phillips-Garcia said. Sako didn't leave the teen's side until rescuers came, 40 hours later.

In Michigan this past New Year's Eve, a golden retriever named Kelsey kept her owner from freezing to death after he slipped and broke his neck outside his house. For the entire night the pooch laid atop him, licking his face and hands, barking until help came. Those are just two of many tales of dog heroics. Why do they save us? "It's due to domestication," says Marc Bekoff, a canine specialist. "Humans selected dogs for the characteristics that we want." Two of those are loyalty and protectiveness, which often manifest themselves as a fearless desire to save us. The biggest factors in protective instinct, says Jean Donaldson, of California's Academy for Dog Trainers, are breed and life experience. Some of the more naturally protective breeds? Mastiffs, Dobermans, giant schnauzers, and Akitas. But most dogs possess the instinct. "It's hard to overestimate the degree to which dogs are bonded to us," she says. "It's an incredibly magical thing." —BRENT CRANE

No.

# 4 You Can Find the Right Dog for You



If you want a dog that's up for an adventure whenever you are, you can't go wrong with one of these breeds. by JOSH DEAN



## LABRADOR RETRIEVER 55-80 LBS

Labs were bred in Newfoundland to help fisherman haul in nets, and there's a reason the breed has been America's most popular for 26 consecutive years. This is an all-around awesome dog that checks every box: athletic, gentle, loyal, good with kids, and smart enough to do anything.

**BEST QUALITIES** They are born with an instinct to retrieve and swim, an aptitude to be trained, and a strong desire to please. No wonder so many guide and bomb-sniffing dogs are Labs. **DRAWBACKS** Labs are famously prone to hip and elbow problems, so make sure both the mother

and father have been X-rayed for genetic joint issues. Also, silver Labs may be advertised, but any color besides yellow, black, and chocolate indicates crossbreeding.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** Labs can do everything, with one liability: lack of endurance. "They tire quicker than some other dogs," says Bryan Barrera, of DC Dog Runner, "but they give it all they've got."

**BUYERS GUIDE** A good starting point is the Labrador Retriever Club [[thelabradorclub.com](http://thelabradorclub.com)]. Wildrose Kennels [[uklabs.com](http://uklabs.com)], an Orvis-endorsed breeder in Mississippi, specializes in English labs, which are generally smaller [50 to 70 pounds] and often have more stamina than the standard American version.



## SIBERIAN HUSKY 35-60 LBS

The husky is an ancient breed relative to most of the purebreds on this list. It emerged centuries ago in the Russian Far East and was bred to pull sleds in the snow. It was brought to the U.S. in the early 20th century... to pull sleds in the snow. Huskies eventually became popular as pets because they're tireless, and have very little aggression, despite their wolfish looks.

**BEST QUALITIES** Huskies are loyal, and have limitless amounts of energy — provided you don't live someplace warm.

**DRAWBACKS** If you do live somewhere hot, don't get one. Your dog will be much less active than he wants to be. They're very social so are best in a house with at least one other dog. Being sled dogs, they need to run and are prone to making a break for it. Fence your yard.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** A Siberian is an excellent hiking and trail running dog, especially for someone who lives in the mountains. "When trained properly, these guys can run for days in cooler temperatures," says Barrera, "and they're surprisingly light on their feet."

**BUYER'S GUIDE** The Siberian Husky Club of America [[shca.org](http://shca.org)]



## STANDARD POODLE 45-70 LBS

Few breeds are as misunderstood and maligned. The poodle originated in Germany and was bred to be a water retriever, and the standard is the largest version of a breed that comes in three sizes. [Miniature and toy are the other two.] They don't have to have that ridiculous hair, either: Those poofs are for show dogs and are only necessary if you want your pet to look like a topiary.

**BEST QUALITIES** Their original purpose was to retrieve birds from water, so swimming comes naturally to poodles, which are very smart and extremely trainable.

**DRAWBACKS** Like Aussies and border collies, poodles are almost too smart. They need to be challenged and exercised daily. Their coat also requires regular maintenance so that it doesn't get too long and turn into dreadlocks.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** This is one of the best hunting dogs on the planet, but you can train a poodle to do just about anything. They're tough enough for cold and snow, quick enough to keep up with bikes, and comfortable in water, so they're great dogs for boat owners.

**BUYER'S GUIDE** The Poodle Club of America is the best place to start [[poodleclubofamerica.org](http://poodleclubofamerica.org)].



FROM LEFT: SHARON HONTROSE/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTINA GANDOLFO; PETRA WEINER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

## 5 | You'll Feel More Understood

Humans and other primates. Horses. Dogs. Studies suggest these are the only animals that can interpret and respond to subtle facial cues. "Having a dog read you gives you a sense of equilibrium and helps you feel less alone," says psychologist Chris Blazina. "This doesn't just provide momentary decompression — it's preventive medicine for psychological and physical problems." —M.J.

## IN DEFENSE OF THE PUREBRED

I have had five dogs in my life. The current resident is a Chihuahua-meets-dachshund mix named Bananas. Before her, two other “Chiweenies,” all rescues and, before them, a little Yorkie named Apples. But, in the beginning, there was Ruby, a French bulldog. Before Ruby, I wasn't a dog person. Then a friend brought her Frenchie puppy to a party and the sheer combination of flat face, bat ears, and Mack Truck physique spoke to me. I became a French bulldog lover.

Was it ethically bankrupt of me to want a purebred when millions of shelter mutts were already in need of a home? Quite probably. But I very clearly envisioned how this breed's temperament fit into my life. At that moment, six months of research culminated in a flight to Florida, where I bought a four-month-old Frenchie.

Through Ruby I learned to love all dogs big and small. That's why when people ask me if it's OK to buy a purebred, I always say the same thing: “Yes, just don't be an asshole about it.” Here's what I mean: A dog is a decade-plus commitment, so do serious research: Hit the Web and learn everything you can about the breed's wants and needs and its genetic issues. The best breeders do it for the healthy continuation of the lineage and will generally ask tons of questions (of you) and make you promise to give back the dog if you are ever forced to part ways.

Bottom line: Nothing matters more than providing your dog a loving, healthy home. If a specific breed makes that happen, go for it. That's what I did with Ruby, and she was the perfect gateway dog for my becoming the mutt lover that I am now. —ROBERT MORITZ



### AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD 40–65 LBS



This American breed — that's right, it's not from Australia — developed on the vast ranches of the West, where shepherds bred together the best bobtailed herding dogs until they'd created a new one that thrived in the high altitudes. Thus Aussies are comfortable in all types of weather.

**BEST QUALITIES** These are highly intelligent, motivated dogs that can run for hours, and are so good with kids that farmers have trusted them as babysitters.

“These dogs have a high desire to please,” says Colorado breeder Carol Ann Hartnagle.

**DRAWBACKS** Aussies have energy to burn, so they need to run. They also shed their undercoat regularly, so you'll need a good vacuum.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** Just about anything outdoors.

**BUYER'S GUIDE** The Australian Shepherd Club of America ([asca.org](http://asca.org)) is generally where you go for working dogs, while the United States Australian Shepherd Association ([australian-shepherds.org](http://australian-shepherds.org)) specializes in show dogs.



### BRITTANY 30–40 LBS

Originally from France and one of the smallest of the all-purpose hunting dogs, Brittans work on land or in water. They're cute and always happy.

**BEST QUALITIES** Sweet, playful, and extremely devoted, they do well with kids and strangers, which makes Brittans great dogs for most sports and hobbies, on- or off-leash. They are small relative to most hunting dogs, so you don't need an SUV or

station wagon to own one.

**DRAWBACKS** Chill is not a state of mind the Brittany often achieves. This is a high-energy dog, which can sometimes translate to separation anxiety and hyperactivity. Good training can fix both in most cases. Like most bird dogs, they're also big chewers. Hide your shoes.

#### WHAT TO DO WITH THEM

Hunting, of course, but Brittans are joyful, athletic dogs that love to run and play — and be with their owners — so whatever you're into, your Brittany will be into it, too.

**BUYER'S GUIDE** The American Brittany Club ([clubs.akc.org/brit](http://clubs.akc.org/brit)) is the national club, and Brittany Breed Info ([brittanybreed.info](http://brittanybreed.info)) is a pretty good primer on these dogs and what to expect.



### BORDER COLLIE 30–45 LBS



Smart and impossible to wear out, border collies are arguably the best athletes in the dog world. These midsize dogs tend to dominate in canine sports like agility and Frisbee, and are always — always — atop the list of smartest breeds.

**BEST QUALITIES** Loyalty and boundless energy. Their hyper-intelligence also makes border collies easy to train.

**DRAWBACKS** This is not a dog you can leave alone all day. The border collie was bred to herd sheep for hours at a time, and that work ethic cannot be turned off. They also get bored easily, so you need to challenge them constantly, which is why they're great for learning tricks.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** Border collies have a natural instinct to nip at things — that's how they get obstinate sheep to cooperate — and some will nip (but not bite) at bike tires, or even small children who seem to be running astray. Thus they're not the best dogs for mountain bikers, skateboarders, or parents of young children.

**BUYER'S GUIDE** Start with the Border Collie Society of America ([bordercolliesociety.com](http://bordercolliesociety.com)), then be clear about your needs and intentions. You want a companion pet, not a dog bred from champion herding stock, so keep that in mind when assessing breeders.



### KARELIAN BEAR DOG

40-50 LBS

This Finnish breed was designed to hunt dangerous game — we're talking moose, boar, and bear. Rangers in some U.S. national parks use Karelians to keep cougars and bears away from campgrounds.

**BEST QUALITIES** Cojones. The Karelian bear dog is basically fearless, and unlike many of the other truly bold dogs (like mastiffs or Leonbergers), they're not massive. You can fit a KBR in the backseat of your Outback.

**DRAWBACKS** Karelians can be aggressive with other dogs and require committed training and socialization. Heed this warning from the Wind River Bear Institute, one of America's best Karelian breeders: "The Karelian Bear Dog has been bred as an independent hunting dog." And once they find that game, these dogs raise a ruckus, so expect some noise.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** Backcountry hike, fish, and ski. They're perfect camp dogs.

**BUYER'S GUIDE:** The two most established U.S. breeders are California Karelians [[karelianbeardog.us](http://karelianbeardog.us)] and the Wind River Bear Institute [[beardogs.org](http://beardogs.org)].



### GERMAN SHEPHERD

50-90 LBS

Shepherds are herding dogs by pedigree, which is how they got their name, and it's hard to find a better mix of brains and brawn. They're tireless workers, extremely loyal, and highly trainable.

**BEST QUALITIES** Smarts. They're also tough, courageous, athletic, and curious, which is why they're so popular as police, military, search-and-rescue, and guide dogs.

**DRAWBACKS** Dog-show people have screwed up a large percentage of the purebred shepherds by breeding them to have a dramatically sloped back, which gives them an awkward gait. This can cause health issues later in life, and it isn't great for athleticism or endurance, so take a good look at a kennel's dog's history before buying a puppy.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** They're good runners for their size, and well-equipped for rugged trails and mountain hikes.

**BUYER'S GUIDE** The U.S. has two clubs, one for show and one for working dogs. Your best bet for good working dogs is the United Schutzhund Clubs of America [[germanshepherd.com](http://germanshepherd.com)].



### STANDARD RESCUE MUTT

ANY SIZE YOU WANT

All breeds began as mutts: They were just feral canines that interbred like any other wild animal. Then they partnered up with humans 30,000-odd years ago, and artificial selection began, which is how we got hundreds of variations — some of them so different from each other (think pug and Great Dane) that it's hard to believe they're the same species.

**BEST QUALITIES** The right mutt, trained correctly, can do anything the others on this list can, with less risk of the genetic health problems that often come with purebreds. Also, if you adopt, you're probably saving a life.

**DRAWBACKS** Mutts come in literally every dog shape and size, from tiny and lithe to huge and lumbering, so adopting a mixed-breed puppy can be a bit of a crapshoot. Knowing the dominant breed is critical information if you want an active dog: You want it to have genes from dogs that like to run and be challenged. But that's harder than it looks.

"When people guess at the primary breed of a shelter/rescue dog, they are guessing incorrectly over half of the time," says Sherry Woodard, an animal-behavior specialist who works with the rescue group Best Friends Animal Society (BFAS). Kennels, and more readily available DNA testing,



FROM LEFT: TRACY MORGAN/GETTY IMAGES; BRIAN SUMMERS/GETTY IMAGES; GRACE CHON

## PICKING THE RIGHT PUPPY

Even at a young age a puppy's personality can stand out: bold and adventurous, cautious and shy, or just plain ornery. No one is more aware of how the pups are developing than the breeder, who's been taking care of them. So after picking a reliable kennel, tell them you're looking for an active dog that's smart and trainable. There are also ways to judge for yourself. "I would look for interaction: Does one pup play with toys and bring them to you?" says BFAS's Woodard. "Look for a puppy that is staying near you, not ignoring you and playing with the other pups." Paying attention to other dogs means they might be aloof or rambunctious later in life. Also, some people choose a shy puppy because they look sad and needy, but those are not qualities you want in an adventure dog. "Shyness can be genetic, and your best efforts to train this pup to be bold and brave may not work," she says. — J.D.

can often help, but one basic rule is to pick a dog with a long snout. The shorter, smushed face typical of bulldogs and boxers can cause breathing problems and hampers panting, which is how dogs cool themselves.

**ADOPTER'S GUIDE** Wherever you are, there's often a shelter nearby. Visit, look at the dogs, talk to the volunteers there. Many kennels will let people foster dogs before committing. If you're adopting an older dog, make sure to see how he or she interacts with other animals to test for aggression, and to determine if he seems controllable off-leash. "Life experiences affect behavior," says Woodward. "If you spend time walking dogs, you can watch how the dogs feel about being near other dogs." Staffers with rescue groups can help you test how a dog does without a lead, and BFAS recently partnered with the dog gear outfitter Ruffwear to create the Ruff Adventure Dog Adoption Program ([ruffwear.com/RAD](http://ruffwear.com/RAD)) to "connect active dogs with active people." Ruffwear covers adoption fees and dog airfare from the BFAS sanctuary in Utah to new homes.

Most good shelters screen for health problems when dogs arrive, but you'd be smart to take a dog to a vet for a full screening before committing to an adoption. Woodard says that it's impossible to know if a puppy is going to grow up to like running alongside a bike or riding in a kayak, but nearly all dogs can learn to love more basic adventures, like hiking. The key is to start training early, build up slowly, and use positive reinforcement — basically, treats — to reward a puppy during a hike, or for staying when you command it not to chase a squirrel. Also worth noting: You can rescue purebreds, too. Every breed in the AKC registry has an affiliated rescue group, or at least has connections to people who specialize in saving dogs of that breed.



## 6 | You Can Bring Out Your Dog's Inner Dog

↑ Your dog's ancestors were bred to work — whether to herd sheep on sprawling ranches, flush and retrieve game, or hunt rats in factories. And now you can let your dog show off the skills he was designed to use.

### BARN HUNTS

Many terrier breeds were developed to hunt rabbits and foxes in tunnels underground. Later they patrolled factory floors for rats. These days you can test your dog's vermin-chasing acumen in the relatively new sport of barn hunting. Rats are placed in aerated tubes for protection, then hidden in a series of straw bales. Whichever dog noses them out fastest wins ([barnhunt.com](http://barnhunt.com)).

### HERDING TESTS

Shepherds and collies herd animals — it's why border collies nip at bike

tires. Farms like Raspberry Ridge ([raspberryridgesheepfarm.com](http://raspberryridgesheepfarm.com)) in Pennsylvania and Rancho Terra Norte in Colorado ([rancho.terrannorte.com](http://rancho.terrannorte.com)), offer herding-instant tests: You basically toss your pooch into a pen full of sheep or goats; then you and a trainer work with your dog to let him do his best corralling. At Vermont's Camp Gone to the Dogs, which offers weeklong canine courses on everything from agility to freestyle dance, you can perfect your dog's sheep driving ([campgonetothedogs.com](http://campgonetothedogs.com)).

### TRUFFLING

Labs, beagles, pointers, and other breeds developed for their sense of smell can be used to find truffles in the forest. Small groups now offer clinics for newbie dogs, including a two-day B&B Truffle Camp outside Portland, Oregon ([nwtruffledogs.com](http://nwtruffledogs.com)). — RYAN KROGH



## NOVA SCOTIA DUCK TOLLING RETRIEVER 35-50 LBS

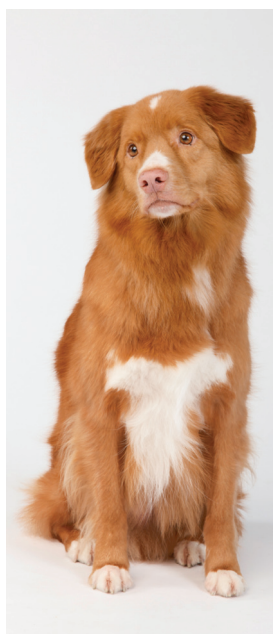
That this breed isn't more popular is kind of a surprise. Tollers are like smaller, more dynamic Labs, about the size and color of a red fox — which is intentional. Canadian hunters noticed that foxes often played along lakes to lure birds. The birds, which seemed mesmerized by their behavior, wandered close to shore and were soon eaten. Tollers mimic this behavior to help hunters, then also swim out to retrieve their prey.

**BEST QUALITIES** They're cute, playful, and extremely energetic, possessing the good temperament, trainability, and hunting aptitude of a Lab but with better endurance.

**DRAWBACKS** All retrievers have an instinct to carry and gnaw on things, so keep a supply of chew toys around. Like every dog on this list, a toller needs frequent exercise and isn't happy being home alone. They can be prone to separation anxiety, which often causes a unique whine/screech known as the toller scream.

**WHAT TO DO WITH THEM** Give them something to retrieve, for starters. They can also keep up on long runs, and their comfort in water makes Tollers good all-around boating dogs.

**BUYERS GUIDE** Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever Club ([nsdtrcusa.org](http://nsdtrcusa.org)).



## 7 | You're More Active (Even When They're Not Around)

Sure, dog owners walk more than non-owners (nearly twice as much, in fact). But they're also much more likely to engage in activities like running and cycling, according to a Michigan State University report, which proves that the little extra exercise of taking your pup to the park just might encourage you to move more the rest of the day. — M.J.

# No. **S**

## They're Ready When You Are

**From hiking and rafting to even BASE jumping, adventure is for the dogs. These four canine sidekicks show you just how big they can go.** by KYLE DICKMAN

### WHISPER

**MINIATURE BLUE HEELER, 7 YEARS OLD**

Whisper may be the only dog to have climbed Yosemite's El Cap and the Eiger, in Switzerland. And she is almost certainly the first to BASE jump from peaks including Half Dome. She was the constant sidekick to climber and BASE jumper Dean Potter, who tucked Whisper into his backpack while climbing and into a custom-designed BASE rig when flying. Apparently Whisper loved it. "It was like a dog sticking her head out the window," says Jenn Rapp, who had been Potter's girlfriend. "Whisper was so happy when they finished." Whisper stopped jumping after Potter's death in a 2015 accident. She's now preoccupied with her new brother, West, a Greater Swiss Mountain dog, who Whisper constantly humps. "People think Whisper is this badass superdog," says Rapp. "But she's just a barking, herding, normal dog."

### KICKER

**GOLDEN RETRIEVER, 1½ YEARS OLD**

In March, Kicker led a backcountry snowboarding tour into a remote Utah slot canyon, then ice-climbed out with Andrew Muse, his partner. Muse is the producer of *Tiny Home*

*Adventures*, a Web series that documents Kicker's road trips around Alaska, as the star of the second season. Kicker has skied from 12,000-foot peaks in Utah's Wasatch and paraglided off sand dunes on Oregon's coast. Prior to Kicker, Muse had another golden retriever named Booter, who died in a car crash. "I thought I'd never get another dog," says Muse. Then two months later, Muse got a call from the firefighter who tended to Booter after the accident. He bred retrievers and had one he wanted Muse to have. Kicker was that dog. "It was beyond fate," says Muse.

### SAM

**RED HEELER, 13 YEARS OLD**

For the past decade, Sam has spent the better part of every summer rafting Idaho's Class IV Middle Fork of the Salmon River, the lead dog in a three-pooch pack that comes along on nearly all of the Middle Fork River Expeditions' 10-plus guided trips. On constant lookout for deer, he's memorized nearly every inch of the 100-mile wilderness stretch. He knows when camp for the night is around the next bend and which rapids are the most troubling. "Now he gets low in the raft before each rapid," says Scott Wilson, Sam's boat driver. Though Sam's swims are far rarer than they used to be, he

still gets knocked into the drink. When he does, he paddles straight to shore, then sprints down the bank until Wilson can find a spot to pick him up. With so many newbie clients, Sam has an endless string of suckers to pet him, even if he barges into open tents at 6 a.m. He's memorized the menus, too, and knows exactly when to beg. "Day five," says Wilson, "prime-rib night."

### GRIFFIN

**LAB-POINTER MIX, 5 YEARS OLD**

Griffin keeps a constant eye on Mason Crosslin, a combat-engineer veteran who spent a year in Iraq and "can't remember a day we weren't attacked." On Crosslin's good days, Griffin climbs boulders at Joshua Tree or trots beside him along the Salton Sea. On bad days, Griffin just lies next to him. Griffin was dispatched to Crosslin through Shelter to Soldier, a San Diego nonprofit that rescues dogs about to be put down and trains them to be service animals. Griffin has since become as essential to Crosslin "as my spleen," the veteran says. And now the two are readying themselves for this summer, which they'll spend in an RV traveling between national parks. "I want to give her the best life I can," says Crosslin. "That means getting outside. But it's not just for her; it's for me, too."



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF JENNIFFER RAPP; COURTESY OF ANDREW MUSE



APELOGA AB/GETTY IMAGES

**T**HE FIRST TIME my little ball of fluff, Lilly, proved her worth as a “connector” was at Law Street Park in San Diego, overlooking a bunch of crappy waves but with the sun shining down on a tattooed blonde girl sitting on the ground. I’m not going to tell you how old I am — I’m old — but from a distance she looked to be maybe 26. She had headphones on and was bopping her head while tapping out texts on her cell phone. After taking her measure, I returned to throw a Frisbee for my Lilly, who is half bichon and half Cavalier King Charles spaniel and the most unlikely of Frisbee dogs ever. She hustled after it, snagged it out of the air, returned it to me panting. I scratched her head and looked up. The tattooed girl had halved the distance between us and sat again and was now looking at me, smiling. Gone were the headphones. Away went the cell phone.

Normally, when it comes to women, I’m about as timid as the common titmouse, but when the girl got up and moved closer yet again, I was on my feet in an instant and ambling her way, Lilly taking the lead.

She spoke first. “So, about the dog,” she said.

And since then, time after time, Lilly has proved to be the best opener ever — with women but also with men, kids, and the

occasional homeless guy sipping whiskey at dawn.

This all got me to wondering: Why? How can you explain a dog like Lilly leading random strangers to disconnect themselves from cell phones, headphones, tablets, laptops, and fitness trackers to participate in an actual, face-to-face human interaction? In the fully wired world, according to one recent study, the average cell phone user engages in 76 separate phone sessions and 2,167 individual touches of the damn thing a day, not to mention having to attend to the phone’s countless beeps, squawks, alerts, and notifications of notifications.

You can tend to those notifications. You can also run into a dog like Lilly who is so captivating that she can instantly transport you back to the technologically unencumbered age of the rotary phone. But what is it about her that makes such wondrous time travel possible?

In 1943, an ethologist named Konrad Lorenz studied the appearance of a bunch of babies, looking for clues to cuteness, which led him to coin the term *Kindchenschema*. Lorenz’s cute taxonomy includes big, wide-set eyes, a compact face with no long protruding nose, chubby cheeks, and a chubby body. Later studies involving brain scans confirmed that when we see one of those maximum-cute babies, the part of the

to *Think Straight About Animals*, had some answers. “It’s Darwinism at its purest,” he said. “Of the estimated one billion dogs on earth, only about 10 percent of them live past that first year. So to survive in a Mexico City garbage dump, say, a dog has to be adopted by a human. And for that to happen, cuteness is absolutely essential. By our selection of the cutest dogs for survival, we’re ensuring that their genes keep them cute.”

In other words, the chick-magnet success of my 10-year-old Lilly derives mostly from that most basic of needs: everyday survival. It had never occurred to me, if only because she’s got the pushover looks of a lapdog. Even so, evolution has made her what she is, which in the fog of cute-doggy attraction has spurred woman after woman to conflate my rather grizzled appearance with that of my dog — so soft, so cuddly, so ready to smile.

But I’m not as shallow as I seem. I’ll sometimes let a man-bun-wearing hipster have his smoochy-coochy-coo with her, or I’ll lift her up so that walker-pushing ancients can get a nuzzle. I’ll even let her change lives.

Late the other afternoon, a toddler barely able to walk waddled in Lilly’s direction, uncertainly at first but then with a smile that led to a flood of giggles, complete with a windmill of waving arms. This went on for about 15 minutes, with the child’s mom



No. 9

## Dogs Are the Last True Social Connector

**In the age of endless texts, Facebook friendships, and forgettable Tinder dates, a dog may be your best shot for real human interaction.**

by ERIK HEDEGAARD

brain known as the nucleus accumbens floods the body with pleasure-producing dopamine. As it happens, all the attributes of baby *Kindchenschema* also apply to animals, and Lilly has every one of them in spades. Plus, she can catch that damn Frisbee.

But what’s the point of a dog being cute in the first place? A psychology professor named Hal Herzog, author of the book *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard*

standing off a bit, a frown on her forehead. Finally, the mom came forward, frown turning into a smile.

“My daughter has never laughed before,” she said.

“What?”

She nodded. “This is the first time I’ve ever seen her laugh.”

I wanted to meet more girls, but what could I do? The laughing went on for another 25 minutes, day turned to night, and the California blondes went home. More giggles erupted, and that’s when I knew for sure that Lilly conquers all — maybe even more than love. 