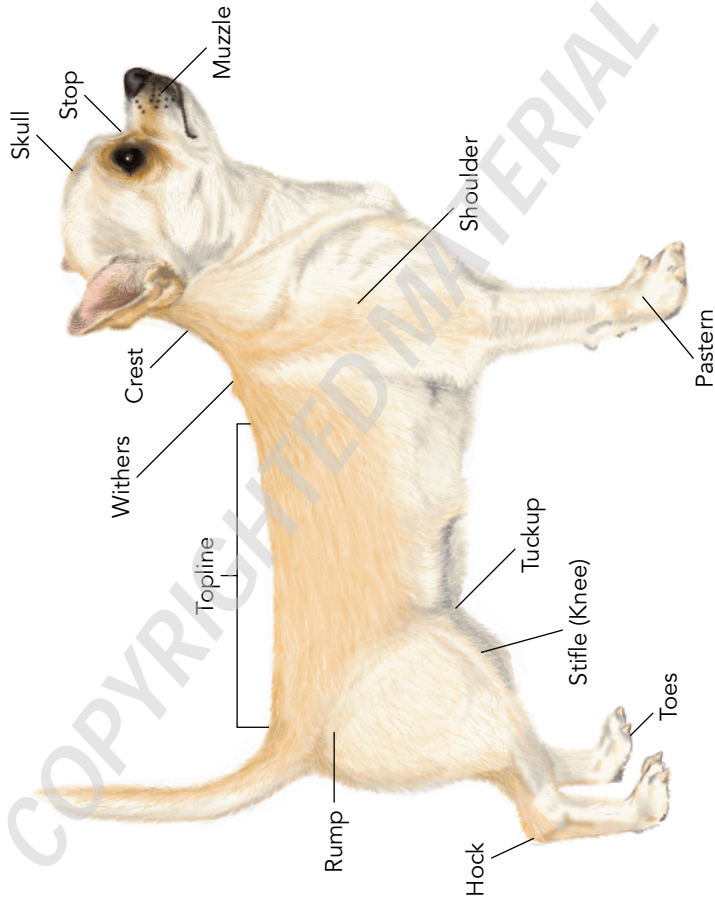


The Chihuahua





Chapter 1

What Is a Chihuahua?



Ever since the first Chihuahua made his American debut, he's become one popular little Chi muffin. With so much hoopla, it's no surprise that he frequently ranks in the top ten of all dogs registered with the American Kennel Club (AKC).

How is it, then, that a dog who weighs less than a sack of potatoes, has a bony apple head, and spends his time either intimidating intruders or looking for a lap, is so appealing?

It's the cute factor. With this breed it's all about being adorable and affectionate, graceful and alert, swift-moving and compact. And the Chihuahua does it all with a saucy expression that says, "I'm fearless; bite me!"

Here's a breed with presence. Tenacious and tough, you know when a Chihuahua's around because you're no longer in charge. The Chihuahua has no clue that he's smaller than you.

There are other reasons for the Chi's star quality. He needs little grooming, doesn't need much exercise, and once inside your bag, he travels light.

A Toy Breed

The AKC assigns every breed to one of seven groups: Sporting, Hound, Working, Terriers, Toys, Non-Sporting, and Herding. The Chihuahua belongs to the Toy Group.

All breeds in the Toy Group are small, but beyond that, each one has distinguishing traits that set it apart from other toy breeds.

What Is a Breed Standard?

A breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect dog of that breed. Breeders use the standard as a guide in their breeding programs, and judges use it to evaluate the dogs in conformation shows. The standard is written by the national breed club, using guidelines established by the registry that recognizes the breed (such as the AKC or UKC).

The first section of the breed standard gives a brief overview of the breed's history. Then it describes the dog's general appearance and size as an adult. Next is a detailed description of the head and neck, then the back and body, and the front and rear legs. The standard then describes the ideal coat and how the dog should be presented in the show ring. It also lists all acceptable colors, patterns, and markings. Then there's a section on how the dog moves, called *gait*. Finally, there's a general description of the dog's temperament.

Each section also lists characteristics that are considered to be faults or disqualifications in the conformation ring. Superficial faults in appearance are often what distinguish a pet-quality dog from a show- or competition-quality dog. However, some faults affect the way a dog moves or his overall health. And faults in temperament are serious business.

You can read all the AKC breed standards at www.akc.org.

This chapter briefly describes the Chihuahua's breed characteristics, as outlined in the breed standard. To read the official breed standard, refer to the Web sites of the AKC or the Chihuahua Club of America (listed in the appendix).

While car and appliance models change from year to year, breeds remain the same because there is a breed standard. Breeders hope that fifty years from now, a Chihuahua will look very much like the dog you see today.

The standard for the Chihuahua was recorded by the Chihuahua Club of America in 1923. Over the years, there have been changes to the standard, usually for clarification. Even with some slight changes, the Chihuahua has



Chihuahuas are little dogs with big personalities.

remained a relatively stable breed in physical characteristics and has changed very little since his arrival in the United States.

The Ideal Chihuahua

Many dogs are intelligent and have wonderful personalities, but it's the Chihuahua's physical appearance that makes him unique. This is a compact breed with a saucy expression and a terrierlike temperament.

Size

Most Chihuahuas are 6 to 9 inches tall when measured from the ground to the top of the shoulders (the withers), and weigh no more than 6 pounds. Some Chihuahuas are larger than that, and although these dogs can't be shown in breed competition, they are wonderful pets and can be much healthier than the very tiny dogs.

CAUTION

Chihuahuas weighing less than 3 pounds are often called "teacups," "pockets," or "tinies," but these are not another variety of the breed. There is only one designated size of Chihuahua. Some people selling puppies will advertise these little ones as exotic and more valuable, but they're actually just the runts of the litter. Teacups have many health problems and very short life spans.

Coat

Chihuahuas come in coats of many colors and combinations: all one color, marked (white areas on a colored background), or splashed (irregularly patched color on white or white on color). Just a few of the colors are white, peach, lemon, silver-sand, mole, sable, chocolate, blue, red, tan, and fawn. Don't pay more for a supposedly "rare" color, because there is no such thing!

There are two coat varieties, as well: Smooth and Long Coat. Both have the same breed characteristics. Breeders often have Smooth and Long Coat puppies in the same litter, and both types shed.

The Smooth

Smooths have a very short coat that lies close to the body. They may have an undercoat—a layer of soft hair under the top, or outer, coat. The coat may be sparser (approaching baldness) on the chest, the temples of the head, and the ears. The tail has furry hair.

The Smooth should also have a slight ruff around his neck, but no fringes or plume like the Long Coat. If the Smooth Chihuahua doesn't have an undercoat, he won't have a full ruff around the neck and won't have a tail that is heavily coated.

Smooth Chihuahuas are more popular than the Long Coats, and many people don't even know that Long Coats exist.



The Long Coat is soft and full, with fringes along the ears and a ruff around the neck.

The Long Coat

Long Coat Chis have a long, soft, double coat that's either flat or slightly curly, about one to one-and-one-half inches long, with a definite undercoat. The long coat has fringe, sometimes called feathering, around the edges of the ears; a ruff around the neck; wisps of hair extending along the back of each leg; long hair, called pants, at the buttocks; and long, flowing hair, called a plume, on the tail.

The Chihuahua Breed Club

Are you a Chihuahua fan? Want to meet other Chihuahua fanciers? Would you like to learn more about Chi behavior, care, and training? If so, contact the Chihuahua Club of America (CCA), a national breed club formed in 1923 under the auspices of the AKC. The CCA is the parent organization of local Chihuahua clubs throughout the United States.

Members of the national breed club wrote the original breed standard of the Chihuahua, under AKC guidelines, and the CCA maintains it. The CCA holds national dog shows, meets regularly, and disburses information about the breed. Since 1987 it has produced five handbooks containing articles about the breed, facts about the club's history, and information about pedigrees.

A Chihuahua owner can apply for membership in the club and join the network of dedicated Chi breeders and owners who care deeply about maintaining the Chihuahua. For further information, contact the Chihuahua Club of America (listed in the appendix).

Head

This breed's head is his crowning glory and the Chihuahua's most distinguishing characteristic. Chihuahuas have large, well-rounded, "apple dome" skulls. The skull is round like an apple and may have a soft spot, known as a molera, at the top. When you gently rub your hand over the molera, you'll feel a slight indentation. More details about the molera are in chapter 8.

The muzzle, sometimes called the snout, is moderately short and slightly pointed. An excessively short muzzle is not desirable because the teeth may become crowded or breathing problems, including frequent snorting, may result.

The nose is very dark in dark-colored dogs and lighter in light-colored dogs.

Eyes

The Chi's eyes are large, set well apart, radiant, and shiny. They're somewhat full, but not protruding. They should never bulge like the eyes of some of the very short-nosed toy breeds. Although eye color is usually dark, lighter eyes are

permissible in light-colored dogs. The ruby eye has a reddish cast to it and is generally found only on very deep red-colored dogs. It's very pretty but is not as common as the dark brown eyes.

Ears

Another distinguishing feature of the Chihuahua's head is his ears. Chi ears are quite large and erect and are set somewhat low on the head. When the ears are at rest, they point to about ten o'clock and two o'clock. When alert, they are carried closer to eleven o'clock and one o'clock, or slightly higher. Ears that are carried as high as twelve o'clock are considered too high and make the dog look rabbitlike.

While a puppy is teething, the ears may be up one day and down the next. Ears are usually fully erect between three and six months of age. If the ears are not standing up by eight months of age, they may never become erect. Erect ears or not, you will still have a very nice pet Chihuahua.

Body

Slightly arched, the Chi's neck slopes gracefully into the shoulders. The body itself is well-balanced. When you measure a Chihuahua from the shoulder to the buttocks, his length is slightly longer than his height. He has a strong, level back, or topline. He also has very dainty feet with well-divided toes.



A Chihuahua should look well-balanced and graceful.

Movement

The Chihuahua moves quickly with strong, sturdy action. Good structure means a healthy dog who can run and play without any restrictions.

Temperament

Fearless, tenacious, and terrierlike, the typical Chi temperament is not fearful, quivering, or cowering. He makes an excellent watchdog, and also likes to entertain his family with his singing ability. If he hears a soprano solo, he'll toss his head back and burst into song. At least, that's what he thinks his yodely, whiny sounds are. But a singing Chihuahua won't win a Grammy any time soon.