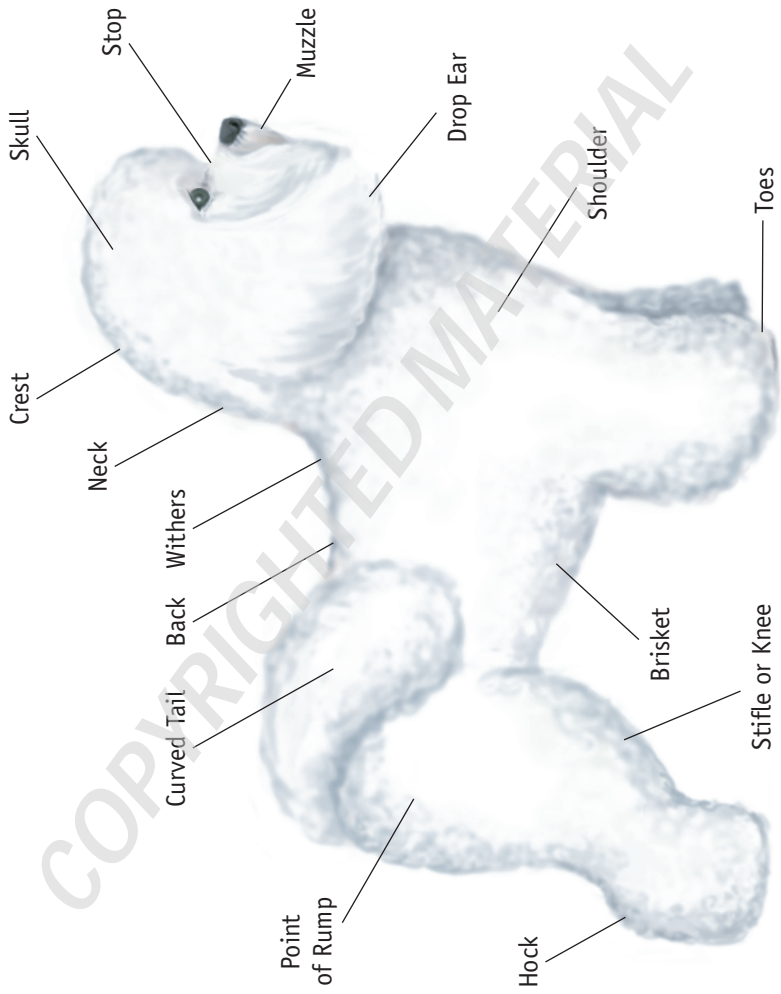


The Bichon Frise





Chapter 1

What Is a Bichon Frise?



Bichons are fluffy, as white as can be, and react to the

world around them with a wagging tail and a happy smile. They look a little like animated plush toys—something that might be marketed for sale for the holidays. But don't let that happy demeanor fool you; Bichons are real dogs. Bichons, even with that wonderful coat, will happily romp in the snow, slush, or mud or chase a rabbit from the backyard. They compete in obedience and agility and make awesome therapy dogs.

Bichons can live happily in a downtown high-rise, a suburban home, or a rural farmhouse. What's important to the dog is his family; Bichons enjoy the company of people. A Bichon Frise should never be a backyard dog, left alone outside for hours at a time, but instead should live in the house with his owners.

For people who want to share their lives with a canine shadow, a Bichon may be the ideal dog. Bichons are great snugglers and will cuddle up close as you read or watch the television, yet are always ready to chase a ball or play with a toy. Bichons are sturdy enough to enjoy long walks and are great ice breakers; it's virtually impossible to go for a walk with a Bichon without at least one person interrupting you with, "What a cute little dog!" A Bichon Frise is a very social, active, versatile, and loyal companion.

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.

What Does a Bichon Look Like?

People recognize many breeds of dogs by their appearance. The Rottweiler's distinctive head size and shape, along with the black and copper markings, identify him as a Rottweiler. A German Shepherd's upright ears, black saddle, and tan or red background coat tell people exactly what breed of dog he is. Although personality, temperament, intelligence, and character are always important, the dog's physical appearance conveys that important first impression.



He may look like a little plush toy, but the Bichon Frise is all dog.

This section will provide a brief description of the ideal Bichon Frise, based on the breed standard. For the complete, official breed standard, go to The Bichon Frise Club of America web site (www.bichon.org).

The First Thing You See

When you first see a Bichon, the dog's fluffy white coat strikes your eye. Although there are many white breeds and several fluffy breeds, there is nothing quite like a Bichon. The coat is very white, although occasionally a coat may have some cream, gray, or apricot hairs.

That plush coat is called a *double coat*. That means the outer hairs and the hairs closer to the skin (called *undercoat*) have different textures. The Bichon's outer coat is slightly coarser than the finer, silky undercoat. The coat is slightly curled. The coat is normally brushed out so that it stands out from the body (rather than lying close to the skin). It is then trimmed with scissors to create a rounded shape.

Male Bichons stand nine to twelve inches tall at the top point of the shoulders (called the *withers*), and females are usually nine to eleven inches tall. Most Bichons weigh between seven and twelve pounds. The body is slightly longer than it is tall, and should give the impression of sturdiness without looking heavy or clumsy.

The Head and Expression

One of the hallmarks of the Bichon is the breed's dark-eyed, inquisitive, expressive face. Although they look like stuffed toys, Bichons are not passive or slow thinking; these are bright, intelligent, fun-loving dogs, and those traits should show in each dog's individual expression.

The eyes are black or dark brown, round, and set in the skull to face forward rather than more toward the side, as in some other breeds. The ears are covered with long, flowing coat and hang down (called *drop ears*). The ears are set on the head slightly higher than eye level and more forward, so when the dog is alert, they frame the face.

The nose is prominent, always black, and is not pointed or snippy. The muzzle is balanced to the head, and the lips are black, fine, and never drooping. The Bichon's jaws should meet in a scissors bite, with the outer edges of the bottom front teeth just touching the inner edges of the top front teeth.

The coat on the head is trimmed to create a rounded look, with the ears (and coat on the ears) included in the roundness. The ears should not stand out from the trimmed coat.

The Body, Legs, and Tail

Bichons love to play ball, chase rabbits, climb obstacles, and hurdle small jumps. To do all these things, a Bichon's body and legs must be well muscled and sturdy, yet at the same time the breed should not be overly muscled. A Bichon is all about balance.

The neck is long and arched, and carries the head erect. The neck flows into the shoulders and back, and the topline of the back is level. The chest is well developed and wide enough to allow free movement of the front legs. The chest extends to the point of the elbow of the front legs. There is a slight tuck up (the waist).

The legs are of medium bone and straight with no bow or curve in the forearm or wrist. The feet are round, like a cat's, and point directly forward. The pads are black. The tail is well plumed and carried happily over the back, with the plumes of the tail touching the back. When moving at a trot, the Bichon should appear to move effortlessly.

The Coat

The texture of the Bichon's coat is very important. The undercoat should be soft and dense, and the outer coat is a bit coarser and slightly curlier. The combination of the two coats produces a dense, springy coat. The coat, when bathed and brushed, should stand out from the body, creating a powder puff appearance.



The Bichon should have an inquisitive, expressive face with dark eyes.

The coat should be trimmed to follow the outlines of the body and be rounded off. The head is trimmed to create a round head. The coat should never be trimmed to create a look of squareness. The plumes of the tail are allowed to grow longer than the hair on the body, so the tail plumes flow as the dog moves.

The Bichon's coat is one of its most identifying features, and the correct coat is very important. However, just as the foundation of a house is necessary for the stability of the structure as a whole, the Bichon's correct structure (bones and muscles) are necessary for a sound, balanced, correct dog. Although trimming the coat may seem to hide incorrect structure, an expert can touch the dog, feel under the coat, and identify those faults.

The Bichon's Character

People who see Bichons usually refer to them as “cute,” and the breed certainly is incredibly attractive. Bichon owners, however, will stress the breed's temperament more than its physical attributes. Bichons are intelligent, alert, inquisitive, and cheerful. They are gentle and patient with children (as long as the kids are gentle with the dog!), and they are tolerant with other pets. At the same time, Bichons are loud watchdogs.

Friends and Companions

When you are loved by a Bichon Frise, there should be no doubt whatsoever in your mind that you are loved. Bichons love their people, both their family and their friends, and greet their people with a wiggling tail and happy smile every time. It doesn't matter whether you've been gone for an hour or a year; you will be greeted enthusiastically in either case. Bichons never forget a friend.

They are devoted family dogs and will be very tolerant of children's antics as long as the kids are not too rough. Bichons are sturdy for their size but will not tolerate rough handling, especially if the dog decides he's been treated unfairly. Although the breed is not known for snapping or biting, a Bichon who has been treated roughly may snap at the hand that is hurting him, so children must be taught proper behavior around dogs.

Bichons are adaptable companions. If you need some quiet time, they are more than willing to snuggle up by your side. But when you're ready to move, a Bichon will be there, ready for a game of fetch or a brisk walk. If you're feeling down, a Bichon is great therapy, snuggling close and providing all the affection you need.

Alert Watchdogs

Although Bichons are small and cute, they do have a serious side. At home, a Bichon will bark when anyone approaches the house. If the person is identified as family or friend, the bark will turn to cries of joy, but if the person is not recognized, the barking will continue until you relieve the dog of his responsibility or the stranger leaves.

A Bichon is not big enough to be able to actually protect you, your family, or your property and should never be considered a guard dog. An intruder could severely injure a Bichon quite easily. However, an alert, barking dog (no matter what the size) can deter some intruders; they would prefer a quieter place to practice their "skills!"

Most people who own dogs enjoy a warning system such as this. You always know when someone is approaching the house, but it can have its downside, too. Although Bichons are rarely problem barkers, they can take their watchdog duties too seriously. Neighbors do not always appreciate a Bichon's vigor! During their training, all Bichons should learn a command that means, "Thank you for warning me, but that's enough now. Quiet!"

Intelligence and Trainability

Bichons are very intelligent dogs and quickly learn to think through and solve problems. They can open cupboard doors, jump on the dining room chairs, and

even open purses left within reach. Luckily, the breed is small; if they were larger they would get into more trouble.

Bichons also have a stubborn streak that is augmented with a little bit of independence. They are not adverse to doing things their own way or ignoring your requests, especially if they're having fun.

Luckily, most Bichons also want to please their owners. This desire to please, combined with the breed's intelligence, means training should be a part of every young Bichon's life. Training should be positive and fun, yet with rules that must be followed.

If you are not recognized as the one in control, a Bichon's natural independence may take over—causing innumerable relationship problems later.



Bichons are versatile, trainable companions.

Versatile Companions

Bichons have had an interesting history (as you will read about in the next chapter), but today they are at their best as companion dogs. They love to be with their people. But the term *companion dog* doesn't mean stuck on the couch. No, Bichons are also quite versatile.

Bichon Frises love to walk and will walk with you in your neighborhood, down along the beach, or at the local park. If you like a little more activity, they love to play on an agility course, climbing, jumping, and running over a variety of obstacles. If you are naturally competitive, Bichons have done well in obedience competition. They are also making a mark in the new sport of rally-O.

Bichons are also excellent therapy dogs. Their cute looks make people smile and their affectionate nature warms people's hearts. Bichons are regular visitors in hospitals, nursing homes, day-care centers, and schools.