

Chapter 1

Catching Pomer-mania

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding your commitment to a dog
- ▶ Considering Poms in particular
- ▶ Weighing the pros and cons
- ▶ Looking ahead

Maybe it's been a long-time dream. Or maybe just a sudden impulse. Perhaps you saw one in a fashion magazine, or carried by a celebrity, or on television, or strutting at a dog show. Maybe your neighbor has one. Whatever the reason, the notion has burrowed into your brain and it just won't leave. You can't think of anything else. You have to have your very own Pom.

But before you pencil a Pom onto your shopping list, stop and think. A dog is a living, breathing being that will depend on you for the rest of his life. You'll be responsible for feeding, walking, grooming, and cleaning up after your littlest family member for the next decade or more. Think hard before entering into that kind of commitment.

The best time to make sure the Pomeranian is really the dog for you is before you bring one home. If you're thinking of meeting a puppy to help you decide, stop right now! Don't take a single step toward that puppy or you *will* be coming home with him. There is absolutely no way you can make an objective decision in sight of a pouncing Pom puppy. So read first, look later — and enjoy for a lifetime!

The Toy-Dog Extravaganza: Pom Popularity

Tiny toy dogs are all the rage these days. Keep in mind, though, that small dogs aren't for everybody.

Toy-dog breeds

The American Kennel Club places the Pomeranian in its Toy group, along with many of the other cutest dogs on earth:

Affenpinscher	Italian Greyhound	Pomeranian
Brussels Griffon	Japanese Chin	Poodle (Toy)
Cavalier King Charles Spaniel	Maltese	Pug
Chihuahua	Manchester Terrier (Toy)	Shih Tzu
Chinese Crested	Miniature Pinscher	Silky Terrier
English Toy Spaniel	Papillon	Toy Fox Terrier
Havanese	Pekingese	

Tiny dogs do have a lot of advantages when it comes to convenience, but they also take some extra care and worry. I explain the pros and cons of tiny dogs in Chapter 2, so please read it and think seriously about the good, the bad, and the ugly — as well as the snugly — before pouncing on the notion of a little dog.



Dogs aren't fashion accessories like purses, shoes, or even giant stick pins, no matter how tiny and cute they are. And just because a dog happens to be *in* at the moment isn't reason enough to get her as a pet. Dogs come in and out of style, and fads change even before a puppy can grow up. But the worst fashion statement ever is when a person buys a dog as an adornment and then discards her when she's out of style.

Now, off my soapbox and back to Poms. Of all the tiny dogs to choose from (which I cover in the "Toy-dog breeds" sidebar), Poms are different because they're the only ones that come from a Spitz heritage. I discuss this and other aspects of Pomeranian history in Chapter 2. For now, suffice it to say that Spitz dogs are the same family that pulls sleds in the Iditarod, hunts moose, and guards homes. To do these jobs, Spitz dogs need to be independent and strong willed. Poms may be little, but they have big spirits *and* big ideas.

Like all dogs, Poms have some frustrating behaviors. They bark (actually, a lot). They chase little animals. They'd rather go hunting than sleep in your lap. They roll in disgusting places, they eat

disgusting stuff, and then they jump in your lap and kiss you in the face. They dig (but at least the holes are small!). They may have accidents in the house. They may have irrational fears or bizarre ideas. After all, they're dogs!

Fortunately, the good far outweighs any bad. Poms love to go places with you, whether it's a trip across the country, across town, or across the room. They're as ready to play as they are to snuggle. They're cute — boy, are they cute! Most of all, Pomeranians prove that you really can buy love.

Sizing Up Your Situation: Know What a Pom Requires

Before you contemplate getting a Pom, take a step back and think about whether you're in a position to get a dog at all. Consider these three issues:

- ✓ **Having a dog is a full-time, long-term commitment.** If you're not into commitment, be sure you think through this decision. A dog will certainly commit to you, but if you change your mind, a shelter may be his only recourse — and that's likely to be a one-way trip.
- ✓ **Dogs require your time on a daily basis.** Sharing your life with a dog means you have to be part-time groundskeeper, home-repair expert, animal trainer, nutritionist, nurse, therapist, recreation coach, and of course, full-time best friend.
- ✓ **Dogs usually aren't free.** The cost of buying the dog is nominal compared to the cost of his upkeep through the years. But this initial cost is a consideration. Pomeranians are neither the most- nor the least-expensive breed around. You generally want to avoid bargain basement Poms and the most expensive retail Poms because neither is a good deal in the long run. Find out why in Chapter 3.

Can you commit to the friendship?

Dogs have the label of being man's best friend for a reason. They bask in your attention and soak up your love, returning your affection tenfold. Poms are no exception. Yes, they can survive without human interaction, but that means you'd miss out on the real meaning of having a dog.

If you work all day and then come home too tired to do anything but zone out in front of the television and flop into bed, you probably don't have time for a dog of any breed. Leaving a dog alone all day with no companionship or entertainment is possible, but it isn't fair. Some large cities have doggy day care, or you may be able to hire somebody to come and entertain your dog every day. Even another dog to play with can make a big difference. But all this effort just to replace you? Think twice before getting a dog if you can't be her best friend.

Do you have a home fit for a Pom?

Do you own or rent your home? If you rent, your ability to live exactly where you want is a lot more difficult with a dog. You may be turned away from at least half the rental properties, and you'll pay a nonrefundable pet fee (with possibly an added charge per month) when you do find a landlord that allows dogs. And what if you move and can't find a place that allows dogs? If your future is unsettled, this may not be the right time for a dog.

A house with a yard is ideal, but Poms are equally happy in an apartment. Despite their sled-dog heritage, Poms aren't outdoor dogs because they lose heat more rapidly than they create it. In other words, little dogs get cold fairly easily. And in warm weather, the survival-of-the-fittest law dictates that little animals are easy prey for big animals. So your Pom may enjoy spending time outdoors, but he's not the kind of dog you can just lock in the backyard for the day — and certainly not for the night.



You also need to Pom proof your home, both indoors and out, by hiding any poisons, securing anything that may fall on your dog, preventing your dog from falling from high places, and protecting him from predatory people and animals. Chapter 5 alerts you to these doggy dangers.

Can you afford to feed and care for a dog?

Although the food bill for a Pom isn't as big a deal as it is for some breeds of dogs (thanks to the Pom's size), feeding a tiny dog isn't a slam dunk. They eat so little that you have to be careful not to throw off their balanced diet with too many treats. And *hypoglycemia* (low blood sugar) can be a real threat, especially with puppies. I explain all this, along with some tips on special diets, in Chapter 8.

A dog needs a bed and a bevy of other supplies (some are necessities and some are just to pamper your Pom) including food dishes, brushes, a crate, a carrying bag, toys, and all sorts of items you can't believe they make for dogs. Chapter 5 gives you some ideas for your shopping list.

In addition to the obvious financial responsibilities of feeding a dog and buying the initial supplies, you need a plan to safeguard your Pom's health on an ongoing basis. This plan includes the following:

- ✓ Finding a good veterinarian before your dog gets sick
- ✓ Taking preventive measures such as vaccinations, deworming, and heartworm treatments
- ✓ Arranging for checkups
Keep in mind that the tests aren't just money-grabs from your veterinarian but important indicators of your dog's health.
- ✓ Deciding on spaying and neutering
They can have some real health benefits for a Pom. As the owner, you need to understand their pros and cons.
- ✓ Knowing and watching for signs of doggy discomfort or disease
Study Chapter 10 so you can nip a problem in the bud.
- ✓ Knowing what problems to look for in an older dog

Exact yearly veterinarian costs are difficult to project, but some averages may be helpful to you as a new dog owner:

- ✓ Yearly checkup: \$80 to \$130
- ✓ Yearly teeth cleaning: \$200
- ✓ Spaying or neutering: \$200
- ✓ Unplanned trips to the veterinary clinic several times a year: \$40 (false alarm) to \$80 (with antibiotics) to enough that *you* need to be hospitalized when you see the bill.



To get a better idea on average costs for your area, call some local veterinary offices to ask about their prices for routine office visits and spaying or neutering a toy dog. You can also ask about emergency fees, but expect a charge of at least a few hundred dollars to see a veterinarian in the middle of the night.

Dogs of any breed can get sick. Dogs of tiny breeds can get very sick very fast. And Pomeranians, like all breeds, have breed-specific predispositions to hereditary disorders. You'll be ahead of the

game to know which problems demand a visit to the veterinarian eventually, today, or right this very second. And you'll want to know which first-aid options, home remedies, and long-term nursing plans can help your Pom get better. Chapter 11 guides you through some of the more common health problems your Pom may encounter.

Do you have the time or cash to groom a dog?

Part of the enjoyment of cuddling with a Pom is snuggling your face in her fur and running your fingers through her coat. But that's not going to be much fun if she smells like a dead rat and feels like a solid felt pad. And that doggy breath — whew!

Grooming a Pom isn't really that hard, but it includes more than just washing and combing her coat. It involves keeping the teeth clean, the nails short, and the fleas off. Chapter 9 shows you all the moves.

If you keep to schedule, grooming takes about 15 minutes twice a week. But if you let mats form, expect to spend an hour or more dematting.

Your Pomeranian doesn't need professional grooming, but some people simply hate to groom or they want their Pom clipped. Depending on the salon and the services, expect to pay \$20 to \$50. If you want a groomer or your veterinarian staff to cut your dog's nails (at least monthly), it usually runs \$5 to \$10.

Do you have the time and energy to play with a dog?

Like all dogs, Poms need mental and physical exercise every day. In fact, they're bundles of energy (compliments of their Spitz heritage). Without enough stimulation, they can become frustrated and destructive, barking, chewing, and running in circles. Fortunately, exercising them doesn't take much space or energy on your part.

Throwing a ball in an apartment several times a day is an easy start. But you can do a lot more. For example:

- ✔ Challenge him with hiding games, teach him tricks, and make him work for his supper.

- ✓ Take him outdoors and just let him soak in the smells. A walk around the block can do both of you good.
- ✓ Keep him busy and thinking with interactive toys while you're gone.
- ✓ Take a trip together. With a little planning, your Pom can be your ideal travel companion.

Check out Chapter 16 for more ideas on entertaining, exercising, socializing, and even competing with your Pomeranian.

Do you have the patience to train a dog?

Dogs that run free, totally unschooled in manners and basic knowledge, are unpopular with people and a danger to themselves and others. Your dog deserves to be trained so she's the best that she can be. You don't need to be a drill sergeant — just smarter than the average Pom.



Training can save your dog's life. For example, she needs to come when called, especially if she's off leash and headed toward traffic. She needs to stop acting like a jerk when she's challenging the giant dog who isn't amused. And she needs to know not to bite people.

Training cements the bond between you and your Pom. In the old days, punishment-based training made training sessions no fun for man or beast. But now, reward-based training has your dog begging for the next session. You see how to do this in Chapter 14.

Do you travel much?

Does your job or hobby take you away from home a lot? If so, where will your dog stay? Boarding costs can range from \$8 to \$30 a day, depending on whether you want him to have a cage at the kennel or a deluxe suite complete with television privileges.

And don't forget doggy day care! Larger cities often have facilities where you drop your dog off for the day. Better day-care centers offer supervised play and training. Costs may be as high as overnight boarding, but many dogs end up pulling you to the door in their excitement to go see their friends there!

Maybe you plan to take your dog with you on the road. If you go by air, you'll pay an extra fee for him, about \$50 per flight. And many motels charge a dog fee as well, usually an extra \$10 per night.

Chapter 12 outlines the best ways of traveling with your furry companion.

Double-Checking Your Motives: Why Do You Want a Pom?

Chances are you've thought long and hard about getting a furry, fun-loving friend. But even with the best intentions, you may need to step back and cool off enough to objectively re-evaluate your choices and timing. After all, adding a family member is a big decision!

Recognizing your reasons for wanting a Pom

Some people jump into this commitment for the wrong reasons. Check out the following not-so-great reasons (and some follow-up responses) to see whether they come close to any of yours:

- ✔ **All the cool celebrities have tiny dogs.** Yes, but do they spend much time with their pet when the cameras aren't clicking? Besides, do they care about expenses?
- ✔ **Toy dogs are the ultimate fashion accessory.** What happens when the toy-dog fad is over? And it will be over — count on it.
- ✔ **A tiny dog is perfect for luring members of the opposite sex.** How long will that person stay before saying, "It's me or the dog!"? Better question: Which one will you choose?
- ✔ **A friend has a wonderful Pom.** Great! That means you can play with hers without spending money on your own. Besides, what are the chances yours will be just like hers?
- ✔ **Dogs are good jogging partners.** Hello! Poms? Well, that's one way to make sure you don't jog far . . . although you can carry her in a back sack and burn a few extra calories that way.
- ✔ **A dog can snap to it and do the owner's bidding.** Two words: Spitz heritage (read Chapter 2).
- ✔ **Previous pets had behavior problems.** Chances are the lapses in behavior weren't their fault. Dogs aren't perfect, and getting rid of them isn't a humane plan. Chapters 13, 14, and 15 can put an owner on the right training path.

Hesitating after a loss

You may have found yourself in the sad position of having recently lost a beloved dog. Half your friends advise you not to get another dog (at least not soon), and half advise you to get another one as quickly as possible. This situation is different for everybody.

You know you can never replace your past dog. Even if that dog was a Pom of the same sex, color, and lineage, each dog is an individual. Consider these two lines of thinking:

- ✔ If you feel you'll be constantly comparing your new dog to your old one, that's not fair. The new one can never be the same.
- ✔ If you accept that this new dog isn't a replacement but an individual that can charm you in his own way, then your new Pom isn't displacing your old dog from your heart — he's merely snuggling alongside your memories.

When you have the right frame of mind, a new Pomeranian can provide a much-needed diversion that helps move your mind in better directions. And what better way to honor your earlier dog than to want another?

Knowing when you're ready to bite the bullet

You've checked your situation, your finances, and the Pomeranian personality. You want a dog for a companion — a true friend who shares your lap by night and a jaunt around the block by day. You can't wait to help her grow into the best Pom she can be, and you're eager to try a few doggy activities with her.

You admire her combination of spunk and cuteness and don't expect her to fawn all over you. You plan on training her but aren't expecting her to be a little soldier and obey all the commands. You plan to care for and love her like any other true family member, and you hope to have her for as long as possible.

You know that to be the best Pomeranian caretaker you can be, you may need to do a little reading. Great! That's where the rest of this book comes in.

Thinking about Breeding?

As you envision yourself writing out that big check and clutching that American Kennel Club registration, you may say to yourself, "Hey, I could breed Poms." You may even start calculating how you'd recoup your purchase price with the first litter or the second stud fee. And you may think ahead a few years to the time your home is covered with hoards of puffy moneymakers, each churning out litters while you just lean back and count the cash. Dream on.

Raising puppies is hard work. If you're considering raising Poms as a business, be aware that caring for a multitude of dogs is a full-time job. You have to feed, poop scoop, groom, socialize, train, exercise, medicate, and love every dog every day. You have to be present for the whelping, and you may need to devote yourself to hand raising orphaned or sick puppies for several weeks.

Raising puppies is also expensive. To breed the right way, the potential parents need to be cleared for hereditary health problems such as luxating patellas, bad hearts, or eye problems, all of which can cost several hundred dollars.



Raising puppies is a huge responsibility in the following ways:

- ✓ You owe it to your buyers to provide only healthy, well-socialized companions, just like you looked for in your search for a puppy.
- ✓ You owe it to your dam (the puppies' mom) to make sure she survives the endeavor. Dams, especially those of toy breeds, can die in whelping. They often need Caesarean sections to save their lives. After whelping, they are subject to *eclampsia*, a potentially fatal condition that causes convulsions. It's your responsibility to make sure she emerges as healthy as when she went into childbirth.
- ✓ You owe it to your puppies to make sure they go only to the best homes. Will their family have only passing interest in them? Be impatient or cruel? You have to be ready to say *No* to families that won't be good owners.
- ✓ You owe it to the breed to maintain the high standards that breeders have maintained for more than a century. Pomeranians who are bad pets, who bite, or who are unhealthy, chip away at the breed's reputation and well-being.

If you can be the sort of breeder that you'd like to buy a puppy from, you may be breeder material. Chapter 3 highlights the makeup of a good breeder.