

The Boxer





Chapter 1

What Is a Boxer?

Congratulations! You have decided to share your life with a Boxer, one of the most engaging breeds in dogdom. I hope the following chapters will help you to understand your Boxer and to care for him so that you live a long and happy life together.

He will return all the love and affection you give—and then some. He will protect you, he will make you laugh on the darkest days, and he will outwit you when he feels the need. His loyalty will astonish you, his energy will exhaust you, and his devotion will always be constant.



The Essence of the Boxer

A Boxer is a complicated animal. More than any other dog, his moods mirror those of his master. His sensitivity is astonishing. While he is a great clown, always ready to run and play, he can display great courage and even aggression when needed. His eyes are almost human in their expression, and in them you can clearly read his state of mind.

A dog with these sensitivities is no wind up toy; he is not an animal who can always be counted on to do what is expected. He is not a dog for everyone, and if you're thinking about getting a Boxer, you must decide whether the characteristics of the breed will appeal.

The Boxer is often the very definition of “independence.” While he may mellow with age, a Boxer is a physically active dog. He loves to roughhouse—he will fetch an object and cheerfully dare you to take it back. He will refuse to move over if you attempt to push him aside. He has a tendency to jump up, and there is considerable muscular force behind these loving greetings.

This agile leaping is no doubt a part of his genetic heritage: His name derives from the German word *boxen*, which, of course, means “boxer.” Although it cannot be definitely proven, the name probably derives from the Boxer’s habit of playing with his front paws. He uses these paws almost like hands—to poke, to punch, and, after giving birth, to cradle puppies.

One cannot underestimate a Boxer’s strength. He is quite capable of knocking an adult man to his knees. It is therefore imperative to train a Boxer to curb his natural tendencies to leap and make body contact. Remember, he was bred to overpower large animals (more about that in chapter 2), so these instincts come quite naturally to your Boxer. Happily, he has no any interest in “holding” humans with his strong jaws. He will, however, grip a toy with unshakable enthusiasm, and one of his greatest delights is to pull with you in a cheerful tug of war.

Until he is trained, your Boxer will also have an instinctive desire to pull on his leash; he could easily drag you down the street. It is obvious that he must be firmly instructed in “civilized” behavior. He is not a dog for the proverbial “little old lady”—until he has learned his manners.

While I have called your attention to the Boxer’s physical strength, it must be said that all his clownish and rough-and-tumble ways are usually tempered with good judgment. While he may gallop right at you as if to mow you down, he will (usually) turn aside at the last delicious moment.

The Ideal Boxer

All pedigreed dogs are bred to a particular standard, a kind of blueprint for the breed (for more, see the box on page 14). The most recent revision of the official breed standard of the Boxer was adopted by the American Kennel Club (AKC) in March 2005.

While you may never seek the near perfection of a great show dog, anyone seeking a Boxer as a pet must be mindful that the standard was also written to ensure soundness and good temperament—paramount qualities in any dog who lives in your household. It’s important to familiarize yourself with the basic concept of the breed standard, so you can enjoy a healthy and happy, well-adjusted Boxer for many years.

General Appearance

According to the standard, the ideal Boxer combines strength and agility with elegance and style. His movements should suggest a dog of great energy—the stride free and the carriage proud.

The Boxer should be square when you consider the length of his body and the height of his legs. He has strong legs and well-developed muscles that appear smooth under taut skin.

Despite a current fashion to breed taller Boxers, the standard tells us that the Boxer “is a medium-sized, square built dog of good substance,” and defines “medium-sized” as: “Adult males—23 to 25 inches; females—21½ to 23½ inches at the withers [the top of the shoulders]. Preferably, males should not be under the minimum nor females over the maximum.” A taller dog who is to remain square will, of course, have a longer body to go with his greater height. The overall impression, then, is of a noticeably bigger, heavier animal than is called for in the standard. Breeders are often cautioned by judges and their peers not to go to extremes of size.

That Regal Head

The standard says, “The chiseled head imparts to the Boxer a unique individual stamp.” The essence of breed type in the Boxer is embodied in his head—from the bone structure to the mood-mirroring quality of his eyes to his lips and chin. The head is what sets him apart from other breeds, and those who know him think of it as beautiful. To the uninitiated, the Boxer head may appear bizarre, but it was developed to enable him to do the job humans required of him. He had to be able to catch and hold fierce game—bear and wild boar—until the hunter caught up. While his jaws had to have great strength, he also had to be able to breathe with his mouth embedded in thick folds of hide and fur. These requirements were satisfied by his head’s unique structure.

The standard says, “In judging the Boxer first consideration is given to general appearance and overall balance. Special attention is then devoted to the head.” The head must be in correct proportion to the body, which means it should never be too large or too small.



The elegant, chiseled head, set atop a graceful neck, sets the Boxer apart.

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.

The Muzzle

"The beauty of the head depends on the harmonious proportion of muzzle to skull," according to the standard. The muzzle should be two-thirds the width of the skull and one-third the length of the head from the occiput to the tip of the nose. (The occiput is the slightly rounded bony protuberance between the ears.) Skin wrinkles appear on the forehead and contribute to the Boxer's unique, slightly quizzical expression. They are desirable but should not be excessive (referred to as "wet").

The Eyes Have It

The Boxer's generous, full eyes are a dark brown color—the deeper shades are preferred. They must not be yellowish (known as “bird of prey” eyes). They should not be too round, slanted, or owlish, or too small. They reflect the dog's moods to an extraordinary degree, and you will soon learn to read them, to your advantage. In combination, the Boxer's eyes and wrinkles on his forehead create an expression—a sweet and gentle look—that is uniquely his.

All Ears

In the United States, the Boxer's ears are customarily cropped—surgically trimmed and shaped to make them stand upright. However, as the 2005 breed standard makes clear, cropping is strictly optional. (Ear cropping is prohibited in Great Britain and is discouraged in other parts of Europe.) When ears are cropped, this procedure is most commonly performed when the puppy is between 6 and 12 weeks old.

The Boxer was originally bred to catch and hold game—sometimes wild boar and other sizable prey—so historically, it was not desirable for him to have long, flapping, easily wounded ears. What began as a purely utilitarian practice ultimately became the fashion. However, many pet owners choose to keep the ears uncropped. In that case, they should lie flat to the cheeks. To crop or not to crop is purely a matter of individual preference.

The Skull

The Boxer's skull is slightly arched on top, not too flat or too rounded. The standard says, “The forehead shows a slight indentation between the eyes and forms a distinct stop with the topline of the muzzle.” (The stop is the area where the muzzle meets the face.) One of the most important features of the Boxer's head is that the “tip of the nose should lie slightly higher than the root of the muzzle.” In other words, the nose should tip up slightly. Historically, this is essential in a correct head so that the dog can breathe while holding his prey. This “tip-up” is very visible in profile.

The muzzle protrudes slightly in front of the nose, further ensuring the ability to breathe. The shape of the muzzle is influenced by the “formation of both jawbones through the placement of the teeth and through the texture of the lips.”

Those Jaws

The Boxer is undershot; that is, the lower jaw protrudes beyond the upper jaw “and curves slightly upward,” ideally with “the corner upper incisors fitting snugly back of the lower canine teeth,” giving the Boxer an almost unshakable grip. “The



The Boxer is undershot, which means the lower jaw protrudes beyond the upper jaw.

front surface of the muzzle is broad and squarish.” The canine teeth beneath the full lips contribute greatly to this look. They should be wide apart in both upper and lower jaws. The row of lower incisors should be straight, while the upper incisors should be slightly convex.

The distance between the upper and lower jaws should be definitive but not so pronounced as to ever show teeth or tongue when the mouth is closed. A wry mouth—where upper and lower jaws are slightly askew and out of line with each other—is a serious fault.

The lips should meet evenly in front. The upper lip does *not* lie over the lower lip. The lips are padded and thick, and the upper lip is supported by the canine teeth of the lower jaw beneath. The Boxer’s chin must be prominent and visible both from the front and in profile.

The Body Beautiful

A natural athlete, the Boxer is designed for speed and endurance when required, reflecting his origins as a hunter, as well as his modern roles of guard and companion dog. While an elegant appearance, especially in the show ring, is attractive and often desirable, he must never be *weedy*. (A weedy dog has a small or light frame.) The dog must always give an impression of real substance—the natural consequence of strong bones and superbly conditioned muscles.

When we say that the Boxer is a square dog, we mean that a vertical line drawn from the highest point of the withers to the ground should equal a horizontal line drawn from the foremost projection of the chest (the sternum) to the rear projection of the upper thigh. To achieve squareness, the Boxer cannot be long through the loin or the back. If he is, he will inevitably look long, and the square, balanced appearance that is an essential feature of the breed will be lost.

The Tale of the Tail

The tail is set high on the back and is carried upward. Customarily it is docked, and anyone who has witnessed the furiously wagging tail of a happy Boxer will see the wisdom of docking. Not only would the long tail be a menace to furniture

and toddlers, but it would also be subject to injury and trauma. Docking is done when puppies are only a few days old. At the same time, front dewclaws (vestigial claws a few inches above the paw) are removed to prevent their snagging and tearing later in life.

Color Choices

The standard says acceptable colors for a Boxer are fawn (shades of tan all the way to mahogany) and brindle (clearly defined black stripes on a fawn background). Brindling may be sparse, with only a few stripes, to exceedingly heavy, where the fawn background barely shows at all. This is known as “reverse” brindling. Both are equally acceptable. Whatever the coat color, Boxers should have a black mask on the face.

The coat is often enhanced by attractive white markings, which must not exceed one-third of the entire coat. In other words, if you can imagine the dog laid out like a bearskin rug, the white markings, including those on the stomach, must not exceed one-third of the body area.

Typically, white markings are found on the face in the form of a blaze and/or a portion of white on the muzzle. If the dog has white markings on the face, they will replace a part of the black mask. The dog may also have varying amounts of white on his front and rear legs, and a white chest and throat. However, white markings are not required under the breed standard.

Totally white or almost totally white Boxers are not uncommon in a litter of puppies. This is a disqualification under the breed standard. While they are not



All-white Boxers are not rare. It's only aesthetics that keeps them out of the show ring; they make great pets and can compete in canine sports.

eligible to compete in the show ring, they can be exhibited in obedience trials, agility, and other performance events. White Boxers make the same delightful pets as their fawn and brindle siblings.

All-Important Character

The character and temperament of the Boxer make him unique among dogs. The Boxer standard says that character and temperament “are of paramount importance.” He is “instinctively a hearing guard dog.” This means that he is always alert to strange noises or unusual occurrences that he might perceive as a threat to either himself or his family.

The standard continues, “[H]is bearing is alert, dignified, and self-assured. In the show ring his behavior should exhibit constrained animation. With family and friends, his temperament is fundamentally playful, yet patient and stoical with children. Deliberate and wary with strangers, he will exhibit curiosity, but, most importantly, fearless courage if threatened. However, he responds promptly to friendly overtures honestly rendered. His intelligence, loyal affection, and tractability to discipline make him a highly desirable companion.”

A Boxer should be fearless, ready to defend and protect. Above all, however, a Boxer loves people—especially children. He is a boisterous, happy dog, always ready for a game or a romp in the woods. He responds with delight to “friendly overtures honestly rendered.” No longer a hunter of boar or bear, he is happiest with the family that he will love beyond measure.



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