

## Chapter 1

# So What Exactly Is a Rottweiler?

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Taking a look at what makes the Rottweiler unique
  - ▶ Knowing the breed standards for the Rottweiler
  - ▶ Figuring out which of the breed standards your Rottweiler must meet
  - ▶ Getting a primer on the Rottweiler's history and what it means to you today
- 

**I**f you're taking the time to read this book, you've probably either seen a Rottweiler in the flesh or at least have seen pictures of the breed. You know what Rottweilers look like. But the Rottweiler is much more than his looks. So in this chapter, I take you through the basics of the breed. I help you understand not only why the Rottweiler looks the way he does, but also why he is able to perform in the many capacities that he's bred for. How a Rottweiler behaves and his high level of trainability are as important as, if not more important than, what the individual dog looks like.

In this chapter, I take you through everything from the German breed standard and American Kennel Club (AKC) breed standard to what you can and should expect from a Rottweiler and why. You get a good picture here of what the Rottweiler is all about, which can help you in your quest to get to know this wonderful and challenging breed.

## *Understanding What Sets the Rottweiler Apart*

The Rottweiler has a reputation for being tough, and deservedly so. But that doesn't mean the breed is, or ever should be, mindlessly mean. The ideal Rottweiler's character and temperament are the result of generations of controlled breeding and rigorous testing by the breed's German developers.

Although the Germans who framed the Rottweiler breed wanted a dog who was courageous and protective, the last thing they had in mind was a dog who couldn't be controlled or one who went off half-cocked.

Mature Rottweilers can be as strong as most men, and probably a lot more agile. In the right hands, a Rottweiler can be the best security system in town and, at the same time, he can be a good friend the entire family can rely on for fun and games. The well-bred, well-trained Rottweiler, like the one shown in Figure 1-1, has the courage of a lion and is as willing to obey as the best-behaved child. In the wrong hands, the very same dog could just as easily be a complete menace. The Rottweiler has an amazing capacity to learn, but he also requires a capable teacher.

Everything in the Rottweiler's history, including the guys in Germany who formulated the first breed standard, demands that the breed be bold, courageous and protective. Yet standing right alongside those requirements are demands that the breed be peaceable and of a good nature — cooperative and possessed of a willingness to learn and to abide by a master's wishes. If the scale tips more to one side or the other, the essence of the Rottweiler is lost. However, if balance is achieved, you have Rottweiler perfection.

**Figure 1-1:**  
A well-bred  
Rottweiler  
can make  
an excellent  
companion  
and a great  
family pet,  
as long as  
you're  
willing to  
serve as his  
leader from  
the moment  
he enters  
your home.



*Photograph courtesy of Judith E. Strom*

## Looking at the Purpose of Breed Standards

With all of this talk about what the Rottweiler should and shouldn't be and how he should and shouldn't act, you may be wondering, "Who says so?" The presiding kennel club of each country in the world has a system for registering the purebred dogs that are born and bred in that country. The American Kennel Club (AKC) is the recognized authority here in the United States. These clubs issue certificates of registration that are probably best described as canine birth certificates. These canine birth certificates are just as important as ours. The only way a dog can be considered a purebred and be registered is if the dog's father and mother (*sire* and *dam* in dog parlance) are registered, and the only way they could have been registered is if their parents were registered, and so on.

For a breed to be accepted by one of the registering sources in the first place, the supporters of the breed must form a club and provide credentials certifying that their dogs were bred true to form and free of *outcrosses* (the introduction of other breeds) for at least five generations. Before a breed is given official recognition, the sponsoring club is also required to submit a written description of the breed that gives a word picture of both what the breed should look like and how it should interact with humans. This written description is called the *breed standard*. Rottweilers were granted recognition by the AKC in 1936.

The AKC currently offers the prospective dog owner 148 breeds to choose from, and there are probably upwards of 400 breeds recognized worldwide. They range from Chihuahuas — one of the tiniest toy breeds, weighing in under 6 pounds — to the giant breeds that include man-sized Great Danes and Irish Wolfhounds. Practically every one of these breeds was developed with a specific purpose in mind. Chihuahuas may have been developed for different reasons than Great Danes, but there was a reason for the development of each breed.

The toy breeds were meant to be companions, in most cases for the ladies who wanted a dog small enough and light enough to be carried around easily. Canine duties for larger dogs range from hunting small game to hauling large loads. The size, shape, and temperament of each breed has been carefully manipulated through many generations to conform to an ideal. To this day, in order for a purebred dog to be a good example of his breed, the dog must not only have a specific look, but must also *behave* in a manner typical of the breed.

Let's face it, if you went out to buy a laid back kind of a dog like a Basset Hound and the dog behaved like a Jack Russell Terrier, you would understandably be somewhat upset. On the other hand, if you brought home a dog

to guard the family jewels and it met intruders at the door with his tail wagging and a road map to the safe in his mouth — well, I think you see the point I'm trying to make.



Most breed standards explain how tall the average dog of the breed you are considering will grow by giving a height at the *withers*. That measurement is taken from the top of the shoulder to the ground. Some standards also give the average weight of full-grown dogs and bitches.



Many breeds have changed so drastically in both form and temperament from the original concept that they are barely recognizable today. Rottweiler breeders in the United States and throughout the world have made every effort to maintain the essence of the breed. A truly outstanding Rottweiler is respected and appreciated anywhere he goes — truly an international citizen.

## The German standard

In Germany, dog breeding was never a case of taking your female dog down the street to get her hitched to the neighborhood male. As new breeds were created, German fanciers organized clubs to improve and protect their respective breeds. If people wanted to breed dogs, they had to join the club dedicated to the breed and abide by the club's rules and regulations.

The club that was organized to oversee the breeding of Rottweilers was the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Rottweiler Klub* (the General German Rottweiler Club, or ADRK). The ADRK wrote a standard of perfection for the Rottweiler upon which all other standards, including the American and British, are based.

The ADRK has never had any qualms about amending or adding to its standard and has created a great deal of supplementary material to accompany the original standard. The information in the following sections is the basic standard advocated by the ADRK. The American (AKC) standard follows the original ADRK standard in essence.



Few titles earned by dogs in foreign countries engender as much respect as those earned by the Rottweiler in Germany, the breed's country of origin. This is largely due to Germany's great reputation for breeding highly intelligent working dogs, and the training ability of the people who work with those breeds.

Read through both the German and AKC standards of the Rottweiler (in "The AKC standard," later in this chapter), and you will begin to see that the Rottweiler is described as a dog of great power and grace. Sheer bulk alone does not give a Rottweiler the strength and agility to perform as the breed was intended.

### ***Size and appearance***

According to the German standard, “The Rottweiler is a medium-large, robust dog neither gross nor slight, nor spindly. In correct proportion he is compactly and powerfully built indicating great strength, maneuverability, and endurance.” In other words, don’t judge your Rottweiler puppy by the pound. The Rottweiler is a medium-large breed, not a giant breed. Huge Rottweilers are often far more prone to joint diseases and other ailments than their smaller counterparts.

“Medium-large” means that the standard is 24 to 27 inches high and 100 pounds for dogs and 22 to 25 inches high and 92 pounds for bitches.

### ***The head***

The head is medium-long and broad in the back. The dog should have pronounced cheekbones and strong jaws, and the upper incisors should close like scissors over the lower teeth. Rottweilers should have a full complement of 42 teeth. Each eye should be dark and shaped like an almond. The ears should be triangular and set high on the skull.

The head sits atop a powerful, moderately long, well-muscled neck that is slightly arched.

### ***The body***

The Rottweiler should have a straight and strong back, a broad chest, and a short *docked* (artificially cut) tail.

Both front and rear legs are straight and not set close together. The feet should be round and hard, with black nails and no *dewclaws* (an extra claw on the inside of the front leg — a kind of rudimentary fifth toe). The thighs are powerful and heavily muscled.

The coat actually consists of an outer coat and under coat. The outer coat is medium-long, coarse, thick, and straight. The under coat must not show through the outer coat. A Rottweiler should be black with sharply defined, dark reddish-brown markings on the cheeks, muzzle, under the neck, on the chest and legs, over the eyes, and under the tail.

When the Rottweiler moves, the back remains firm and relatively motionless. The gait is harmonious, positive, powerful, and free, with long strides.

### ***Faults***

A dog with no faults simply doesn’t exist. Every dog deviates from the ideal in some way. Still, the breed standard has a long list of faults that judges and breeders are asked to take note of. These include having a narrow or long head; light eyes; a back that dips down or humps up; crooked legs; a coat

that is too long, too short, too soft or of the wrong color; and various faults of the ears, eyes, nose, cheeks, lips, feet, legs, tail, back, chest, and just about every other part of the body. A Rottweiler who looks less than solid and strong is also considered to have faults. These faults should be weighed carefully when a dog is being judged, either in the show ring or in a breeding program, but they don't eliminate a dog from contention.

However, some faults do eliminate a Rottweiler from contention in dog shows. These more serious faults are called *disqualifying faults*. Disqualifying faults include dogs that look like bitches (and vice versa), having yellow eyes or various eye conditions, missing molars, missing testicles, a long and curly coat, white markings, or grossly incorrect colors.

A dog who is nervous, shy, or vicious also has a disqualifying fault. According to the German standard, the Rottweiler "is descended from friendly and peaceful stock and by nature loves children, is affectionate, obedient, trainable, and enjoys working. His rough appearance belies his ancestry. His demeanor is self-reliant, with strong nerves and fearless character. He is keenly alert to, and aware of, his surroundings."



Although not all breed disqualifications (flaws that eliminate a dog from being shown) necessarily eliminate a Rottweiler from being a happy, healthy companion, there is one that does. Any Rottweiler of unsound temperament should not be shown, bred from, or *ever* owned as a pet.

## *The AKC standard*

The AKC standard for the Rottweiler is much more detailed than the German standard, because the German standard is accompanied by official statements of requirements that are not necessarily contained in the standard. The German standard and the accompanying statements are far more likely to be amended or changed over time than is the AKC standard. Changing an American standard requires serious consideration by both the AKC and the American Rottweiler Club (ARC); the membership of the ARC must put any change to a vote.

### *Size and appearance*

According to the AKC standard, "The ideal Rottweiler is a medium large, robust, and powerful dog, black with clearly defined rust markings. His compact and substantial build denotes great strength, agility, and endurance. Dogs are characteristically more massive throughout with larger frame and heavier bones than bitches. Bitches are distinctly feminine, but without weakness of substance or structure." Sound familiar?

Height is the same as the German standard for dogs and bitches (24 to 27 inches for dogs; 22 to 25 inches for bitches), but no weights are given in the AKC standard. The standard then goes on to say, “Correct proportion is of primary importance, as long as size is within the standard’s range.” The formula for figuring correct proportion is that the ratio of height to length should be 9 to 10.

### *The head and body*

In the AKC standard, the Rottweiler’s head and neck are described with much of the same language as in the German standard. However, the AKC standard makes two additional points:

- ✓ The underline of a mature Rottweiler has a slight *tuck-up*, which means there is an upward arch to his belly.
- ✓ “The back remains horizontal to the ground while the dog is moving or standing,” which provides a lot of information about proper structure.

The AKC’s descriptions of a Rottweiler’s coat and markings are pretty much the same as the German standard as well. But the AKC standard tells us that the Rottweiler is to be exhibited in the natural condition with no trimming — in other words, there’s no fudging a coat that’s a little too long.

Faults, both disqualifying and not, are also much the same.



A long-coated Rottweiler cannot be shown at AKC shows, but they are born into some litters. This does not change the character of the dog, and as long as the pet owner has no intention of showing or breeding a long-coated Rottweiler, he makes just as good a pet as his short-coated littermates.

### *Temperament*

The AKC standard has this to say about the Rottweiler’s temperament:

The Rottweiler is basically a calm, confident, and courageous dog with a self-assured aloofness that does not lend itself to immediate and indiscriminate friendships. A Rottweiler is self-confident and responds quietly and with a wait-and-see attitude to influences in his environment. He has an inherent desire to protect home and family and is an intelligent dog of extreme hardness and adaptability, with a strong willingness to work, making him especially suited as a companion, guardian, and general all-purpose dog. The behavior of the Rottweiler in the show ring should be controlled, willing, and adaptable, trained to submit to examination of mouth, testicles, etc. An aloof or reserved dog should not be penalized, as this reflects the accepted character of the breed. An aggressive or belligerent attitude towards other dogs should not be faulted. A judge shall excuse from the ring any shy Rottweiler.



Most established breeders anticipate that at least 95 percent of the Rottweilers they breed will spend their lives in homes as family companions. Therefore, the one thing they will not make concessions on is temperament — and that applies to not only the dogs they keep to show and breed but also to the majority of their dogs, who will be household pets. However, temperament is a two-way street. A well-bred Rottweiler puppy comes to you with a sound and stable temperament, but you must return the efforts of the breeder by making sure your puppy is properly socialized and given the proper amount and kind of training. Otherwise, the best efforts of the breeder will fail.

## *Knowing Whether Your Rottweiler Has to Fit the Standard*

The standards I cover in this chapter are guidelines. Because nothing in nature is ever perfect, these guidelines act like carrots in front of a good breeder's nose — perfection is always just out of reach. The best of a breeder's efforts are what he or she uses to perpetuate the line and what often becomes show stock — the dogs who are campaigned to achieve Championship status.

Some dogs do, of course, fall just a bit too short of this elusive perfection to be either show stock or breeding stock. They are the Rottweilers, both male and female, who are intelligently bred and of sterling temperament but who just don't have what it takes to come home with all the blue ribbons.

A highly recommended breeder will give you the assurance that the puppy or young adult you buy will meet the highest physical and temperamental standards of the breed. That must be your top priority in the purchase of a Rottweiler. Minor cosmetic shortcomings will not change the breed's compatibility or temperament. When you are going to live with a dog for many years, a tiny blemish here or there is not going to make one iota of difference.



If you are looking for a Rottweiler that you want to show or breed, you must discuss your plans with the breeder so that he or she can help you choose a puppy that qualifies both temperamentally and physically.

## *Taking a Quick Tour of Rottweiler History*

By the time Romans were attending games in the amphitheaters, humans had developed a level of sophistication that was reflected in many ways. Classes of society had developed so that there were those who did the work and

those who sat around and thought up all kinds of work for everyone else to do. One of the things thought up was how to further meddle with nature and make more breeds of dogs out of those that already existed.

The noble ladies of Rome had tiny dogs to sit on their laps and keep them company, but real men (the ones who didn't eat quiche) had dogs that were large enough and fierce enough to fight lions, tigers, and assorted other wild beasts in the arena. Only the largest, strongest, and fiercest of these dogs were allowed to fight in the Roman arenas. These brawny beasts were known as the *Mollosus*, and although there were undoubtedly many candidates for the honor of tearing everything in sight limb from limb, not all the dogs qualified. From the same litters that produced the arena dogs came the dogs that became guards, protectors, and *draft* (hauling) dogs for the Roman legions. Ancient writings that describe these military dogs reveal dogs that were similar to the Rottweiler as we know the breed today.



Bravery and protectiveness have been selected for throughout the Rottweiler's history, and they are qualities the breed is respected for to this day. The great efforts that those who love the breed have expended in developing a dog that uses these qualities wisely is something worthy of your respect.



The Roman legions that set off to conquer the world as they knew it were veritable moving cities. Because they were often gone for years at a time, everything that was needed became a portable part of the troop movements: livestock, harvested crops, shoe repair shops, pottery makers, blacksmiths, shop keepers, servants for the officers, and sometimes even their wives.

Because the Roman armies were constantly on the move, their dogs had to serve a more diversified purpose than the fighting dogs of the arenas. Their great courage was employed to ward off wild animals that threatened the livestock that accompanied the legions, but the dogs had many other duties as well. The speed and agility of the dogs made them excellent drovers for the cattle that accompanied the troops. Their large size and great strength made them capable of hauling carts loaded with weight that often far exceeded their own.

## ***The Rottweiler's German roots***

There is no recorded proof that these Mollosus dogs were, in fact, the ancestors of today's Rottweiler. However, dogs of this type existed throughout every region of Europe where the Roman legions traveled — including Germany. As early as 2000 B.C. the Romans occupied a town in Southern Germany that they called Arae Flavia. It was an isolated but strategic town militarily and politically. For this reason, Arae Flavia became a highly developed administration

and social center. The town had a large enough population and sufficient activity to encourage setting up the fun-and-games facilities the Romans were accustomed to back home. Baths and brothels proliferated, along with the more serious aspects of the Roman lifestyle such as temples and aqueducts.

All this activity called for building administration centers. The more important of these centers had red tiled roofs, and the town eventually became known as *Rottwil* (translated, it means “red villa”).

Through the ages, Rottwil (later Rottweil) endured invasions and occupations that decimated the Roman populations, and their dogs along with them. The surviving dogs found mates among the local breeds, and, as time passed, two distinct types of dog emerged. One type was very large and was used primarily for draft work. Those dogs also doubled as guards to ensure the safe arrival of the contents of the carts they pulled.

The other type of dog that developed in Rottwil was a more moderate but versatile variety. No less courageous an animal, the smaller dogs were initially used for herding, but as time passed they became known as the *Metzgerhunde*, or butcher’s dog, because so many of the people who made their living as butchers kept the dogs. Eventually, though, the two types of dogs merged and became known simply as Rottweilers.



According to folklore, in the Middle Ages Rottweilers were known as the butchers’ dogs of Rottweil. The name developed from the fact that butchers of the area tied the money they would use to buy cattle around the dogs’ necks for safekeeping. What thief would dare take the money off the neck of a Rottweiler?

## *The changing role of the Rottweiler*

In spite of the unique adaptability of these dogs, they were not exempt from the social changes of the following years. With the arrival of the 20th century, many of the jobs that had been performed by the Rottweiler were eliminated. Industrialization began to make the existence of the dogs an expense rather than an asset. By 1905, breed history discloses, there was only one dog, a female, of this type left in Rottweil.

Elsewhere, because of the German fondness for the Rottweiler, efforts began to save the breed from extinction. A short-lived International Club for Leonberger and Rottweiler Dogs was established. The first written standard for the breed was published by that organization in 1901. This standard was followed in 1907 by the organization of The German Rottweiler Club in Heidelberg, and, through that club’s efforts, the breed prospered and was recognized as a service dog for use with the police and the military. With this formal recognition, the breed’s situation really started to improve.

By 1920, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Rottweiler Klub* (the General German Rottweiler Club, or ADRK) was formed to protect the Rottweiler's physical and mental health. Strict codes of conduct were established for Rottweiler owners, including making sure all dogs had hip x-rays performed to prevent *hip dysplasia* (a degenerative joint disease that is prevalent in the breed). Only the very best dogs were allowed to be bred.

The members of the ADRK were dedicated to preserving and enhancing the health and welfare of the Rottweiler. Their purpose was to eliminate from the gene pool any dog who did not mentally, physically, and genetically live up to the extremely high standards of the organization. The ADRK was highly successful in its efforts to preserve the best qualities of the breed, and it was not long before the rest of the world began to take an interest in this rugged protector.

## ***The transplanting of Rottweilers to the United States***

The first Rottweilers were imported into the United States in the 1930s, and the breed was given full recognition by the American Kennel Club in 1936. The breed was also registered with The Kennel Club in England in 1936.

The first American-born Rottweiler litter recorded was bred in 1930 by Otto Denny, a German immigrant who had already established himself as a breeder before he left his homeland. Denny's litter was not registered with the AKC, but instead with a German-based breed club — not an unusual occurrence at the time.

Stina v Felsenmeer was the first Rottweiler to be registered with the AKC, and when she was bred to Arras v Gerbermuhle, Stina's was the first AKC-registered litter. From that point on, interest in the breed began to grow in America — very slowly at first. But over the next 60 years, the popularity of the breed grew to what dedicated fanciers saw as alarming proportions.

When World War II came to a close, America began to forget its anti-German sentiments and Americans had more money to spend than many knew what to do with. Sports and hobbies like dog breeding and dog showing began to attract interest. In 1960, the AKC registered 77 Rottweilers. Thirty-seven years later the tally was nearly 77,000!

Amazingly, for a breed that was to soar to such heights of popularity finding American supporters in the early days of the breed was difficult. Not until the 1960s was the first failed attempt made to organize a national club for the breed. After several stops and starts, in 1973 the American Rottweiler Club found enough support to become the first national club for Rottweilers in the United States.

Initially, the Rottweiler earned itself a place of respect with American dog trainers and in obedience circles. It was only a matter of time, however, before the breed also began to catch the eye of those who were showing dogs in the conformation rings.



The breed's first American conformation Champion was Zero, a male belonging to Paul Jones. Zero's sister, Zola, became the first female Rottweiler champion. Jones became a founding member of the American Rottweiler Club. Jones also handled the first Rottweiler to win a Working Group first in this country. The first all-breed Best in Show was won by Ch. Kato v Donnaj, CD, TD, owned by Jan Marshall.

A lot of credit for maintaining the level of quality that had been established in the Rottweiler's homeland can be attributed to the efforts of Clara Hurley and her Powderhorn Press in California. Hurley translated and published the many important books written by the breed masters in Germany, giving Americans the benefit of all the work that had already been done on the breed's behalf. Hurley was also instrumental in establishing the Rottweiler Registry to chart the status of hip dysplasia.

## *The Rottweiler's role in modern day*

If you have no immediate plans to cross the Alps, send your dog off to gladiator school, or tie your life savings around your Rottweiler's neck, you may be wondering what you can give your talented, energetic dog to do.

The size, agility, and intelligence level of your Rottweiler open doors to both of you that you may never even have considered. The following list barely scratches the surface of areas in which the Rottweiler has excelled:

- ✓ Obedience programs
- ✓ Hospital therapy volunteer programs
- ✓ Search and rescue work
- ✓ Herding trials
- ✓ Carting trials
- ✓ Watchdog work
- ✓ Schutzhund training
- ✓ Tracking tests
- ✓ Agility competition

If you want more information on these and other fun activities you and your Rottweiler can do together, check out Chapter 9.