

Can a Doberman Pinscher Be a Service Dog?

Written by John Walter, FDS

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Grim the Doberman Pinscher is trained to assist with stability, anxiety, and PTSD. He can also perform seizure alert functions.

I've known a few brave disabled people in my lifetime and because most people in my life know I am absolutely in love with the Doberman breed, the topic has come up more than once about Doberman Pinschers being used as service dogs. Here's what you need to know if you're considering a Doberman service dog.

Can Dobermans be service dogs? **Doberman Pinschers are a working breed that's highly intelligent, easily trainable, hyper-focused on their owners, loyal, and eager to please. These qualities make the Doberman an excellent breed for use as a service dog.**

Many people don't picture a Doberman as a service dog. While it's true that they aren't very common in the service dog world, the Doberman does naturally possess all of the qualities necessary to be a great service dog, therapy dog, or emotional support animal (ESA). However, A lot more goes into selecting, training, and putting a service dog to work than just selecting a capable breed.

With each step in the process, you should always take into account the Doberman's unique qualities and adapt the process accordingly. When I got my first Doberman I got a crash course on these unique qualities.

If you're new to the Doberman breed, take a look at my [complete Doberman Pinscher breed overview here](#).

Why Dobermans Make Great Service Dogs

There are no breed restrictions on which breeds can be service dogs. In fact, there is no certification, identification, or even mandated training that a dog must go through to become a service dog. So yes, Dobermans can be service dogs just like any breed can, and actually, they are more geared towards this kind of work than many other dogs.

Dobermans were originally bred as guard dogs. Luckily, many of these guard dog traits are easily transferable to accomplish other tasks, such as those needed to be accomplished by service dogs. They are actually becoming more popular in recent years as guide dogs for the blind, therapy dogs, seizure dogs, and even search and rescue dogs. This breed can really do it all!

Before we go any further, many people get confused with the differences between an Emotional Support Animal (ESA), Therapy Dog, and Service Dog as well as with what rights each type of animal has or doesn't have. So here's a brief description so you can get a better idea.

Emotional Support Animal (ESA): An emotional support animal can be any animal, not just a dog. Yes, there can be “emotional support pet rats” believe it or not. These animals are meant to help only with mental health issues and not physical disabilities. They can live in no-pet housing and board airplanes with their owners but have no other special privileges. To exercise these privileges, you’ll need a note from a doctor. These animals are not covered by the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).

Therapy Dogs: Therapy dogs are the dogs you often see visiting patients in hospitals or in nursing homes. Their job is to provide emotional support and comfort. They cannot accompany their owners on planes or any public place. They are registered with a therapy organization and have to undergo testing and be covered by an insurance policy. Therapy dogs are not covered by ADA.

Service Dogs: These are dogs that are specifically trained to perform specified tasks for someone with a disability. They can go anywhere a human can go in public and are protected under ADA. Legally, they are considered the same as necessary medical equipment.

Really, a Doberman can perform any of these three roles with proper training. Below are many of the characteristics of the Doberman breed that make them great for this type of work. In general, Dobermans are:

- Calm and not easily excitable.
- Very alert at all times.
- Highly intelligent.
- Easily trainable.
- A working breed that loves to accomplish tasks.

- Instinctually inclined to help.
- Minimal shedding and clean dogs.
- Inclined to bond strongly to one specific person.
- Highly focused on their masters.
- Called “velcro dogs” because they love being very close to their owners at all times.

The biggest negative quality that people cite as to why they believe Dobermans cannot be good service dogs is because “they’re vicious.” I know, if you’re already a Doberman owner then you’re probably getting frustrated just hearing that.

The reality is [Dobermans are not instinctually vicious](#), a case could be made that they are instinctually protective (which is another great quality in my opinion). But any viciousness you may have seen in a Dobie in the past is not because of their breed, I promise you. It comes from their environment and training. They are very calm and gentle dogs normally.

These traits mean that these dogs are excellent guide dogs for the blind, seizure alert/medical response dogs, social signal (SSIG) dogs for those with autism, mobility assistance dogs, hearing dogs, or even therapy dogs for those in a hospital or nursing home.

Video: Doberman Undertaking Service Dog Training

Assistance Dog in training @ ASDT Trinidad



Using a Doberman as a Service Dog

While Dobermans are clearly naturally able to be a great help to someone with disabilities, or someone needing comfort in a hospital, there are some things that you should do differently if you're raising a Doberman to be a service dog. This breed has some unique traits, so they should be considered while raising or training a dog for this work.

- **Cropping the Ears** – The classic Doberman look is a dog with cropped ears. As a service dog, it may serve them better if they're left uncropped. Unfortunately, many see the cropped ears look as a trait of an aggressive dog. Uncropped ears make the dog appear more friendly, approachable, and fit in better in public settings. Another issue to consider is if medical help comes to your aid, they might be less likely to jump in and help you if you have a 100 pound Doberman with cropped ears named Butch staring at them.
- **Breed Bans** – Some cities are imposing what is called “Breed Specific Legislation” or BSL. This means that some municipalities have enacted ordinances banning certain breeds of dogs from being owned in their area. Also, many apartment complexes or landlords also have their own rules when it comes to which breeds they may allow or not. Very often, Doberman Pinschers are on these banned breed lists. Even if you are exempt from these regulations because the dog is a service dog, you may still have to explain your situation more often than you'd like.
- **Protection Training** – If your Doberman is going to be a service dog, you cannot also train them for personal protection in any way. Besides, this may be a large liability issue for you if something does happen.
- **Socialization** – Dobermans need to be socialized often and from a young age. This is specifically true if you wish to use a Doberman as a service dog. It will help ensure they are gentle and calm at all times. Plus they love socialization with both dogs and humans.
- **Separation Anxiety** – This is a pitfall that's easy to fall into with a Doberman for a service dog. They bond strongly to one specific person (great for service work), but this can lead to separation anxiety if the dog is ever without you. Through your training, make sure your dog can be away from you without getting stressed.

- **Mental and Physical Stimulation** – Dobermans need lots of both. The mental stimulation will likely be easy to stay on top of as long as you are continuously challenging your Dobie with further training. Physical stimulation might be a bit tougher. These are muscular, fast, working breed dogs that need to get out and run from time to time.

These are the main differences you'll likely notice when using a Doberman as a service dog when compared to other breeds. Overall, they are a magnificent dog and although I am not disabled and my Doberman isn't a service dog, I often feel like it isn't a stretch at all to picture him in that role. He just plain loves helping me, looking me in the eyes, and trying his best to figure out what I want of him.

What You Should Know Before Getting a Service Dog

From talking to many people who have owned service dogs over the years, there were a few things that almost all of them told me that people considering getting a service dog should know.

For one, be prepared for every errand you run taking significantly longer than you



Swipe up to Expand ^

expect... It takes time to load and unload your

dog, get their gear on, and talk to all the people who approach you. Doberman get attention from strangers anyway, but a service dog that's a Doberman will make the issue worse.



Two service dogs. One of which is Grim, the Doberman Pinscher. He is excellent at his job and is a multitasking service pup!

Strangers will ask lots of questions (sometimes inappropriate questions such as “what’s your disability?”), kids will want to pet your dog, and the list goes on. What was once a 20-minute trip could easily be a 45-minute trip with a service dog.

Also, be prepared for people to take a lot of photos of you and your Dobie strolling down the aisles in the grocery store and post them all over social media. Mainly pictures from the back. Yes, your rear end will end up more on social media than you ever thought possible if you own a service dog (I would imagine it would be far worse with a Doberman service dog).

Know Your Rights – They'll be Challenged

Unfortunately, be prepared for the occasional dispute from businesses about allowing access for you and your dog. This is especially true with Dobermans since many are afraid of the breed. These people are not trying to deny you your rights, they just don't know what your rights are, so you need to know them. Service dogs can go anywhere humans can go in public. Have a look at the [ADA's Requirements and Rules](#). This will answer many of your questions.

Businesses can only legally ask you two questions:

1. Is that a service dog required because of a disability?
2. What tasks does the dog perform?

Those are two questions you need to answer. You don't need to answer any questions about what your disability is and your dog is not required to have any paperwork or identification.

Sometimes business owners will say that your dog is required to have this paperwork or identification because they've seen it before on other dogs. Other people who have paid for and gotten this documentation just fell for one of the countless online scams that claim to be able to certify your dog for a small fee. It is not required and holds no legal standing.

However, businesses can ask unruly dogs to leave (even service dogs) if they don't appear to be under the owner's control.

Lastly, don't fake it if your dog isn't a service dog. Many states are now adopting laws making it a crime to fake that your dog is a service dog. It also really does a disservice to those who legitimately need and use a service dog.

Qualifying for a Service Doberman (or Any Dog)

In general, to qualify for a service dog you must be considered disabled by a medical condition. This condition must be one that severely limits or completely prevents you from completing common everyday tasks. A doctor will be able to discuss your specific situation with you and determine if a service dog is appropriate.

Owner Trained Dogs vs. Program Trained Dogs

If you've decided that a service dog, or even a Doberman Pinscher service dog, is right for you then you'll have to decide if your dog will be owner trained or program trained.

Owner Trained – This means you find the dog, pick the puppy, and arrange for training yourself. There are many books, YouTube videos, and training courses that can help you in this process. If you choose this option, take your time and do lots of research beforehand. Also, consider your limitations. A puppy is a lot of work, especially one that you want to be trained to be your service dog. Make sure you are able and willing to take on this task.

If you go this route, seriously consider hiring a dog behaviorist or trainer to accompany you to your breeder to assist you in picking out a specific puppy from the litter. Getting a puppy with the right natural temperament is key to his or her success later as an adult service dog.

Program Trained – There are programs where you pay for a completely trained service dog. The cost is usually anywhere between \$5,000 and \$25,000, although

there are many programs for disabled people out there that can help you to get a dog at no cost. Be prepared for a 2 year wait time on average though and don't trust any place that says they have a dog ready immediately.

Just be sure you get your dog from a reputable organization because there are a lot of scammers out there. A great place to start looking is Assistance Dogs International. They have [this database of accredited members](#) that are all considered very trustworthy places to get a service dog. You may have to call around a bit to find one that will have Doberman Pinscher's available as service dogs but just be sure to make your request clear. You won't be disappointed with the breed.

What Tasks Doberman's Can Perform

Doberman service dogs are fully capable of performing all the typical tasks you'd expect from an exceptional service dog. Including assisting with mobility, medical alerts, turning on and off lights, opening and closing doors, picking up dropped items, guiding the blind, and so much more. I've really only scratched the surface here.

My Doberman is certainly not a service dog but I have taught him to help me with a fairly long list of involved tasks. I wrote an article about some of the [more advanced tasks Dobermans are capable of here](#)—with a few tricks tossed in just for fun.

Final Thoughts

Getting any service dog will mean a major lifestyle change. If you do choose to take on this task, I couldn't think of a better type of dog than a Doberman Pinscher. Their loyalty is unmatched and you'll be amazed at how intelligent and trustworthy these amazing dogs can be.

Related Questions

Can a Doberman be a therapy dog? Yes. Dobermans have a very calm demeanor and if they are well socialized can be perfect for a role as a therapy dog

Can Dobermans walk without a leash? Doberman Pinschers are highly intelligent dogs that are very focused on their masters. Their natural traits make them very capable of going on walks without a leash and can be trained to react predictably to only verbal commands.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Walter is a Family Doberman Specialist, holds a CPD certification in Canine Communication, and is an active dog trainer specializing in the Doberman Pinscher breed. He's been quoted in Doberman Network Magazine, Bark Magazine, Doberman Dispatch, and he's the founder of Doberman Planet. [Learn More](#)



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