

So, just what are schipperkes like anyway?

A light-hearted introduction to this unique breed. By Kristin Morrison

For anyone who has ever owned a schipperke before, you need not be told about this wonderfully captivating little breed.

For those who are inquisitive about this unique breed, here is a candid view of the schipperke.

They are often referred to as a big dog in a small package, or to those of us who love them, as little black devils. You must know in advance that the reference to them being devilish, is meant with love, and to really know this breed is to love it!

They average anywhere between 10-18 pounds as a mature adult, and are about a foot tall, females are typically smaller. Schipperkes have a distinct pattern and texture of their coat which includes a thick double-coat (this breed does shed). This along with the lack of a tail, adds to the unique look of this breed.

Schipperkes originated in Belgium and were used as vermin hunters on the canal boats in the provinces. Many shopkeepers also employed a schipperke's services as rat hunter and watchdog. For the size of these dogs, they certainly pack a much larger bark than would be expected.

Schipperkes of today are mostly companion dogs, for most any type of family or home environment. Many of them still hold that "ratter" instinct, and are active and successful hunters of moles and the like.

Schipperkes are active dogs that very much enjoy such activities as hiking, walks, boating (with proper precautions), couch lounging, toy tossing, or simply just playing in the yard. They also enjoy some light gardening (some do dig) and being messenger to alert of visitors (they do bark).

Most schipperkes do get along with other dogs and often enjoy having a "playmate".

Schipperkes can make good family dogs because they are affectionate, and are good with children (if raised and socialized properly), but can tolerate more active endeavors and family outings as well. They can be protective of family members, but are easily assured of a welcomed guest.

You must know that schipperkes can tend to be stubborn (but then again, who of us is not?), but are very eager to please. Due to this eagerness to please, they train rather easily to many commands, and are good house dogs with proper training. Schipperkes do have a mind of their own (if you have not realized that yet), and so are not typically trusted off leash. Many times their curiosity gets the best of them and "off they go" after a squirrel, or even a leaf for that matter!

They tend to be appropriately sensitive and attentive, and need very little discipline. No dog should ever be hit for misbehavior, or any reason for that matter! It only takes a stern voice, and a "what did you do" for a schipperke to show its sensitive side. Schipperkes have this silly way of showing submission, and it often comes in the form of a "grin or smile". This is not them being aggressive, it is in fact the opposite. Often times, if a schipperke takes something that they know they should not have, they give themselves away with a very guilty look on their face!

Admittedly, this breed is not for everyone.

Perhaps those of us who love this breed can be referred to as tenacious, since schipperkes can be mischievous and sometimes present their owners with a challenge. Despite this, most schipperke owners

will admit that they find this to be an endearing quality of this breed. They keep us on our toes, and often offer up cause for many laughs.

Most people who have once had a schipperke just can't resist them, and admit that schipperkes have fully taken their heart like no other breed of dog has.

As you can tell from previous discussion, schipperkes are mischievous and very intelligent by nature. If you are considering a schipperke as a family pet that is certainly something that you should be aware of. Due to their intelligence and desire for adventure, they excel at many interesting activities. Aside from being great companions they do enjoy time spent outdoors and eagerly accompany their family on hiking adventures, boating excursions and similar activities.

Although these activities may be fun for many, what if you want to do more with your schipperke?

Schipperkes are very agile and their small size makes them very easy to travel with. Many schipperke owners have had great joy training their dog for obedience, rally or agility. The schipperke is very eager to please its owner and typically finds clearing the jumps and the full out running of some of this training to be fun. Some schipperkes have been known to show skill in herding sheep while others like to use their ratting instinct in barn hunt trials where they are sent in to locate rodents.

There are many fun activities like fly-ball, Frisbee or dock diving that schipperkes may find fun and exciting.

Like any of us, schipperkes do like to have fun, but they certainly can be serious “work” dogs. Many schipperkes have been used as therapy dogs to visit patients in nursing homes or hospitals and some have even been used as service dogs for many things including alert dogs for seizure patients as well as service dogs for the hearing impaired. This certainly shows off their sensitive side and their attentive personality.

One other very serious aspect to the schipperke is their ability in search and rescue situations and scent trials. One schipperke team in particular has helped in the search and recovery of missing persons. The Schipperke Club of America has recently welcomed this team of dogs into its Hall of Fame for their efforts.

There are a few other fun, “work” type activities that schipperkes are capable of as well. They might enjoy backpacking. In some instances schipperkes have also done carting or sledding. In each of these activities the dog would be equipped with a properly fitted harness or backpack. These activities are more common in larger breeds, but they are things that schipperkes enjoy also.

As you can see, there are a great many activities that you as an owner may find very fulfilling with a schipperke. They are happy to be couch companions or something far more exciting. All it takes is an equally committed owner, training and of course, love!

For more information on the schipperke, visit the SCA website at www.schipperkeclubofamerica.org

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