

## TERRIER-LIKE QUALITIES?

The breed standard for the Chihuahua calls for “terrier-like qualities of temperament”. This topic is always guaranteed to start a lively discussion among Chihuahua people; everyone has his or her own interpretation of the sentence and what it means in relation to the rest of the standard.

I was at a show not long ago, exhibiting a young dog in a class of two. We took them around the ring, and as we brought the dogs to a stop, the dog in front of mine spun around and set himself in a sparring stance. My dog moved to the end of his lead and reacted in kind. Both dogs stood facing one another, quiet but quivering, up on their legs with chests forward, necks arched, heads high, and eyes locked. This went on for about 15 seconds, and broke only when the judge walked over and said, “For a moment there, I thought I was in the terrier ring.”

That was a terrier moment; Chihuahuas have them all the time. The breed exhibits terrier-like tendencies from early puppyhood. The sparring, burrowing, and digging instincts are all there in young Chihuahuas. The terrier-like lack of fear becomes evident with age and proper socialization.

The history of the breed is murky at best. The Chihuahua as we know it developed within the last 100 years, and many practices were allowed in the breed’s early development that would be frowned upon today. At any rate, it is a pretty fair bet that small terrier types contributed a great deal to the Chihuahua of today. As to temperament, the Chihuahua can be a very outgoing little dog—fearless yet playful, but sometimes rowdy—and still be a loving and loyal pet. We should celebrate this type of temperament—it is what most people are looking for in a dog.

The temperament called for in the standard is a far cry from the public’s perceived image of the breed. It used to be that when you said “Chihuahua”, most people thought “unpleasant ankle-biter”. Over the years, the Chihuahua Club of America, the regional specialty clubs, and concerned breeders have worked diligently to change this perception. In these times of televised dog shows, it is very important that the temperament called for in the standard be shown in the conformation, obedience, and agility rings. As the old saying goes, “seeing is believing”.

In the next column, the subject of assessing temperament in the show ring will be discussed, and with luck, some judges will tell us their views. The subject of sparring Chihuahuas will be discussed, so it could get exciting!

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