

# What encourages a person to keep the *one* breed of dog for over thirty years?

When I talk to the public at The Royal Easter Show, the Pet Expo or even walking in the park I am invariably asked: 'What kind of dog is that? It looks like a dingo.' When I reply, 'It's a Basenji; or sometimes called the African barkless dog.' The usual response is either 'Your neighbours must love you.' or 'What good's a dog that can't bark.'

When I first found the Basenji, neither of these thoughts crossed my mind. I wanted a small, alert dog that could keep my elderly mother company as she was recovering from heart attacks & a minor stroke.

We started looking for a Fox Terrier as this had always been my breed of choice as a child. I still remember happy days spent following ferrets & terriers chasing rabbits with my brothers. Unfortunately we couldn't find THE ONE.

When we visited the first Basenji kennels we left feeling dissatisfied. However within minutes of sighting the dogs at the second kennels I WAS IN LOVE. Here were all the characteristics and personality that I associated with dogs as family friends.

I was drawn to the upbeat, loving, joyous atmosphere that they created in the household. They played & romped with each other and the breeder's children. The pups were independent and adventurous: the adults were curious yet did not fawn to us.

After weeks of negotiation, I had the dog I wanted & Mum had a buddy to keep her company during the day while I was at work. The breed also had a new show exhibitor. My mother had shown Pekinese so I had a vague idea of what was involved.

That all happened in 1974 and I still have Basenji. I now breed and exhibit and happily spread the word to the uninitiated: Basenji are great dogs.

On the surface the plus aspects to owning a Basenji are a short coat that rarely smells, no barking, small and love being with the family. They are quite often owned by asthma and allergy sufferers. They are clean in themselves & usually dislike dirty conditions. They are known to literally clean both sides of their bowls. People with wet feet are diligently dried( even when you're getting out of the shower).

The main negative points are having no road sense at all, being very hard to obedience train and being able to out think most people.

As a family pet they can be outstanding in their love & affection. Pet owners often tell me stories of their Basenji interactions with their children. Who loves to shadow that mischievous preschooler around the yard? Who sits between your child and that not quite trustworthy visitor? Whose duty is it to be dressed up in the larger dolly clothes? Who warms you with its little body when it's chilly on the lounge? I recall one very smart four years old telling me he could get the dog to do anything.' I just have food with me and he's really good.'

We breeders are consistently approached by young adults who had Basenji as children and maintain 'Great dogs for kids!'

They make great dogs for the teenager as well. Your basenji is always happiest when it is with you. They are always just as ready for a walk (on lead) as they are to sleep in bed with you. I think this is something that makes them ideal for teenagers who are very active one day & 'moody' the next. Basenji seem to have an uncanny empathy 'button'. It's not unheard of for a Basenji to put its head on your shoulder to give you a comforting lick or snuggle.

The Basenji has for many years been a popular dog for Junior Handler competitors. Long time exhibitors will recall seeing Gary Dymock & Glenway Dymock (Afrika Basenji) who is now an international judge based in England, Tanya Du Toit a regular Jn Handler State finalist, Jodie & Kylie Delacourt ( Wazazi Kennels), Angela Fotheringham (nee Tromp), Mellisa Fox of Zandeena Kennels and Rene Wilson. All had their own dogs & showed them very successfully in handler and breed classes. There are also currently several accomplished teenagers such as Lucy Massey, Tegan Ketteringham and Nicky Craig who exhibit successfully. Nicky handled her young bitch Wazazi Awesome Beauty to Best in Show at the NSW Specialty Champ Show (2007). I think all who saw this young girl & her dog could only have thought of 'poetry in motion'. Basenji & teenager were as one as they outperformed all others on the day.

Thankfully, I feel Basenji have also proved to be great company for those of us in the "well matured 'category. My mother had eight good years of company from my first Basenji. Even in her seventies, Mum would spend the day in the garden with Plato (Yes, he was a clever thinker!). She enjoyed sharing her coffee milkshakes with him & he took delight in showing her the strawberries that were damaged by snails. But then, he didn't share those with Mum.

Numerous buyers have owned pet Basenji for twenty or more years. Some breeders have puppy buyers coming back after many years for another pup as the original has passed away. It seems a breed that elicits the comment: "Oh I couldn't have another breed. It just wouldn't be the same!"

Now this either says something about the character of the breed or of the people who are drawn to them. Yes. All the stories you hear about them being strong willed, not easy to train, obstinate and evil little devils that won't go outside in the rain are quite true .

But who amongst us could not love the dog that sleeps with its head on our pillows; that chooses to sleep all day on my lounge wrapped in an \$800.00 patchwork quilt; that walks tightly by my side if it feels that there is *something* in the dark; that checks out every room in the house and everything the repairman has touched; that drags the toddler away from the steps; that goes bush for eight days & comes back in show condition or who stands over my body in bed while the house next door is robbed.

But most of all who would change to another breed when your dog looks at you with such adoration in its eyes that an observer declared: 'That dog would die for you!'

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