

LIVING WITH THE PULI

By Dagmar Ferti



A Puli (pronounced Poo-lee) is not a dog – it’s a Puli. If you wish to think of the Puli as a dog, that would be a big mistake, for which any Puli and its owner(s) will be more than happy to correct you. Puli breeders/owners are fiercely loyal to, and protective of, this breed. In return, the Puli forms very strong bonds and feels the same of its family. Typically, Pulik are reserved with strangers and prefer their own family. If you meet (or own) a “friendly” Puli, do not assume that one you meet thereafter, is the same.

The Puli is a Hungarian breed. The breed’s history reaches back at least 2,500 years. The important thing to remember is that as a nation, Hungarians are survivors, and that trait is also evident in the Puli.

Pulik are well-known as independent thinkers and hard workers. It is essential that the prospective Puli owner be fully aware of the forceful, mouthy (vocal),

and opinionated nature of the Puli that is to become the lord and master of their manor. It takes a strong-willed, smart person to take on this equally strong-minded and intelligent breed. Be forewarned: a Puli feels totally justified in taking on the running of your life for you. This was actually a highly-valued trait by Hungarian shepherds, as they rather wanted to sit in the shade, and didn’t mind paying a year’s salary for a Puli, who would do the full job of minding and tending the sheep. Of course, it was also survival of the fittest, because if the Puli didn’t do its job, the shepherd didn’t share his meal with ‘the help,’ and we all can guess the end of that story.

Many Pulik (pronounced Poo-lik; this is the plural of Puli, not Pulis) enjoy conformation dog shows, herding, agility, obedience, tracking, Frisbee, canine freestyle (aka dog dancing), as well as participating in the very important job of therapy dog (visiting nursing homes

and hospitals). The Puli is recognized as a talented and agile athlete, renowned for its sheep herding ability. If your thing is herding, be prepared to have other people not understand how a Puli works sheep. The Puli knows that his shepherd is probably asleep under a tree somewhere, leaving his own safety and that of the flock in more capable hands (ahem, I mean, paws). It is therefore, necessary for the Puli to come on like a tornado, jumping, and barking at the sheep. Many Pulik ‘just’ need to show up and give the eye (and yes, you can give the eye even it’s buried under a bunch of hair).

The Puli frequently become dreadfully bored by repetition during training. Many a Puli enjoys nothing more than a job well-done. Pulik are often convinced that they know better how to do a job than how you asked them.

The average Puli is 16 to 17" in height and weighs anywhere from 22 to 37 pounds. Pulik are often very slim and trim



under all that hair, if you really get your hands under the coat. All in all, the Puli is a very convenient-sized and sturdy animal; this really is having a big dog in a more portable package.

The Puli was once divided into large “police,” medium “working,” and small “dwarf” variations, but the breed standard established that the medium-sized was closest to what was desired. Using their boot height, Hungarian shepherds rigorously measured the Puli, and the perfectly-sized Puli was one that shoulders were “lower

than the highest point on the boot”. With people generally growing taller these days with improved nutrition, correspondingly we’ve noticed Pulik keeping up with boot height. All kidding aside, all of the size variations are possible in a litter.

Black is the most often seen color, but gray and white and some other colors are in the gene pool. Some Puli owners have commented on the differences in personality based on color. The black Puli is typically more serious, while the lighter-colored Pulik are more free-spirited and happy-go-lucky. But don’t think that doesn’t mean that a black Puli doesn’t know how to have a good time.

When moving through the show ring, a Puli seemingly floats above the ground. The coat acts as insulation, protecting against the brutal winter temperatures that Pulik historically encountered on the Hungarian Puszta (i.e., grasslands) and summer heat, with its typically woolly undercoat (lighter-colored Pulik have a more cottony composition, with them becoming hot faster than their black counterparts). This does not mean that the Puli should be allowed to sit outside for extended periods of time in the heat – something any good Puli will vocally complain about.

Puli people are often asked if puppies are born with cords. The newborn puppy has a very short coat that is glossy with lots of wave to it (the more wave, the better the cording coat later). As they become older, puppies then have an adorable fluffy coat. At about six months of age, the coat begins to clump and mat, and at its ‘worst’ stage looks like you’re living with a buffalo or wildebeest. This is the time when you (and anyone you know) wonder what you were thinking in getting a Puli. The Puli’s coat

(with some human intervention) at about 2 years of age truly resembles the corded appearance.

The most important things to remember for a Puli coat are, when bathing, to be sure to rinse and rinse (and then rinse more) and to be sure to thoroughly dry the dog. If not fully dried, the coat will have a mildewy odor and more importantly, you could end up with cord rot (i.e., cords dropping off). Since it takes 5 years for the cords to form and grow to the ground, this would be very sad. Athletic (i.e., agility) and pet Pulik are often seen in shortened coats. A cut-down Puli’s coat is often tight and curly, and many people leave cords on the tail in a nod to the distinguishing characteristic of the breed.

In short, it’s the cords that might first attract your attention, but it’s the personality, loyalty, smarts, and work ethic of this breed that Puli owners hold dear in their hearts and souls. ■

BIO

Dagmar Fertl and Team Black (which includes 3 Pulik) live in the Dallas Metroplex. Dagmar has been owned and trained by 5 Pulik in her life, all coming from her mother Irma’s breeding program. Dagmar’s Pulik work towards versatility titles awarded by the Puli Club of America, participating in conformation (all are champions), herding, agility, obedience (including Rally), and therapy dog work. Dagmar’s passion is agility, and her Puli “Kai” recently earned her PACH (agility champion title). Dagmar is a marine mammal biologist who has published numerous scientific and popular articles, as well as two children’s books.

