

What's the Scoop on Papillons?

By Beth Nolley

Nine out of 10 Papillon owners described their Papillon as, “the best dog we have ever had.” Nonetheless, the Papillon Club of America Rescue Trust (PCART) sees all too many Papillons given up because they didn't fit their families. Although Papillons may come in a soft, fluffy package, they pack a powerful dose of happiness and exuberance that proves to be contagious to their owners. According to Dan Wolfe, the proud owner of three Papillons, Gizmo, Chloe and Charlie, “From the day tiny puppy Gizmo landed in our lives, he has personified (‘dogified’?) the word *exuberant* with every waking moment.”

The acrostic below lists just a few of the words that Papillon owners have used to describe their beloved Paps' temperament:

P layful
A lert
P atient
I ntelligent
Loyal
L oving
O bservant
iN tuitive

When Northern Virginia Papillon owner Kathy Frame recently suffered a terrible bout of food poisoning, her Papillon, Chrissie, never left her side. Sara Helmke's Papillon, Riley, also senses when she is not feeling well and wants to remain with her. However, Papillons' innate sense of when their owners are in a weakened state is not the only impetus for them to be magnetically drawn to their owners. Papillons are companion dogs and have a natural tendency to want to be with their owners, preferably in physical contact with them, at all times. They love to sleep on their owners' laps, cuddle with them in the bed, and tend to follow their people around the house. Papillon owner and

breeder Leslie Tracy commented that her Paps follow her everywhere she goes, to the extent that she has not been to the restroom alone for years!

An extraordinary number of Papillon owners will vouch for the “talking” phenomenon they have witnessed in their dogs. Although Papillons, like all dogs, lack the capacity to form speech, they constantly push the envelope and communicate verbally with their owners in “Papillonese.” They grumble, they mumble, they groan and make guttural sounds, all while moving their jaws as if they’re speaking in syllables. Ranked among the top 10 breeds in Intelligence Quotient, they display visible frustration at their mechanical inability to carry out an intelligent conversation with their human family members.

Colleen Shoemaker compared her Papillon, Lily, to a toddler. “She is very smart and never tires of playing repetitive games 24/7,” she said.

However, Papillons are not all fun and games. They can also be cautious, territorial and assertive. April Yeager described her Pap, Kirby, as being a “Jeckyl and Hyde” dog at home. “One temperament is extremely energetic and loving,” said Yeager. “Her other temperament is a viciously aggressive and territorial guard dog. When we go out in public, she adopts a third temperament. This one is extremely shy and cautious.” Kathy Frame’s Papillon also demonstrates caution when out in public with a group of dogs. “Chrissie does a lot of observing of other dogs,” said Frame. “It is as if she is trying to figure it all out.”

Papillons are the canine version of Vidalia Onions: sweet yet complex, with many layers – so what then would be their ideal home environment? According to the Hollen Family of Northern Virginia, who got their Pap, Pixie, when she was 10 months old, Papillons need to be a part of a family, and not just a pet that gets a few scratches each evening. “Anyone adopting a Papillon needs to be available to give them lots of attention and lap time,” said Vera Hollen. “They are very smart and like to be stimulated.”

The majority of Papillon owners interviewed concurred that the ideal home for Paps of any age seems to be one with someone who is able to devote a lot of time and attention to them. Although Paps are energetic and require ample exercise, they are also very content to nap on their owner’s lap for hours. Karla Solomon of Reston, whose family got

their Pap, Kipper, when he was one year old, said, “Kipper likes a lap more than anyplace else. He can take a 3-mile walk, but is also fine if we don’t go out much when the weather is bad.” Solomon added, “He enjoys hanging out with my 83-year-old father when we visit him... following him around the yard or sitting on his lap while watching TV.”

“Riley loves everyone, every age,” said Sara Helmke. “We have parties where there are a lot of people here, and he just goes up to each one to see what they will do for him. We have a new baby grandson and he just loves him and wants to kiss him, so we let him kiss his feet only. He plays with my other grandson who is seven. He lays down quietly beside my 82-year-old mother-in-law so she can pet him.”

However, most Papillon owners concur that pre-school-age children and Paps do not mix. Papillons’ bones are simply too fragile to withstand the oftentimes rough (albeit unintentionally so) treatment from young children. “Their little legs are so fragile,” said Karla Solomon. “I would not feel comfortable with Paps in a home with children under teenage years.” Andrea Lubeck, whose 9-year-old daughter, Mila, is the proud owner of a Papillon named Little Valley, said that if Paps are a part of a family with young children, they would best be suited in a home where the children are very cautious, careful and loving. Alternately, Paps’ high energy can prove to be overwhelming for young children. “They can be just too darn energetic and could well run rough-shod over a toddler,” said Dan Wolfe. “I think they require a great deal of interaction with their surroundings,” said Wolfe. “Putting them with people who can’t keep up with them may present challenges.”

“They seem to thrive in families with no small children and at least one other dog or playful cat to socialize with,” said April Yeager, who also highly recommends exposing Papillon puppies to many different people and dogs at a young age in order to avoid territorial aggression. “They are a product of their environment and will develop their personalities according to how they’re raised.”

Although often labeled the perfect “apartment dog,” many Papillon owners would disagree. Amy Dobson, who lives in a townhouse with her two Papillons, Tonka and Trixie, said, “I can’t imagine a smaller space than our townhouse for them. When they really get excited, they run in the shape of an 8 around all the furniture and have a lot of

fun doing it. And for puppies, they need to go out *so* much that I can't imagine having to take them all the way down from a third floor apartment that many times. I think they like having the freedom to go upstairs and be away from everyone when they want.”

Karla Solomon commented that her Pap, Kipper, would not make a good apartment dog because he would be able to hear other dogs and doorbells, which would cause him to be very barky. Papillon owner and breeder Leslie Tracy stressed the importance of Paps having space to run and exercise outdoors, but to keep in mind that Papillons are not meant to be *outdoor* dogs 24/7. “A fenced-in, escape-proof yard is a must,” said Tracy. “And owners must be able to tolerate a few destroyed flowers and craters in the [garden] beds from time to time.”

Although Paps may on occasion wreak havoc on outdoor gardens, they don't tend to be destructive indoors. “I don't know how we got so fortunate, but none of our three dogs makes a single move toward any of our property,” said Dan Wolfe. “Somehow, they know what's theirs and what's ours.”

Many common-sense precautions can help to avoid dangerous accidents for Pap puppies. Sara Helmke “Papillon-proofed” her home by making sure there were no dangling cords for her puppy to chew on, blocking off large drops like stairways, and giving her puppy lots of dog chews to keep him busy. “Pixie does not get into things,” said Vera Hollen. “The only things we have to keep off the floor are pencils, pens and markers.”

Some Paps are more “inquisitive” than others, particularly when they live with children. Karla Solomon said she uses a baby gate to block her Pap, Kipper, from her childrens' rooms, since Kipper has a penchant for stealing her daughter's stuffed animals – thinking that they are his. “We spray all our electrical cords and furniture with Bitter Yuk,” said Leslie Tracy. “We provide an unlimited supply of bully sticks, which are not harmful to them like the rawhide chews. Toilet paper on a roll is fair game to rip up, so we keep our paper out of the dogs' reach.”

“My Papillon is like a billy goat,” said Colleen Shoemaker. “She eats any and everything found on the carpet.”

The majority of Papillon owners interviewed concurred that dog crates prove to be very helpful tools to keep their Paps out of trouble when they remain home alone. Most

dogs consider their crates to be their private “den” and will often go there of their own accord to nap or to hide their most cherished toys. “Both Trixie and Tonka will go by themselves and sleep in their crates without any direction from us,” said Amy Dobson.

So what’s the scoop on Papillons? They embody exuberance for life, uphold the highest degree of loyalty to their owners, possess above-average canine intelligence, and can adapt to various types of home environments. It would seem they really are the best dogs. Unfortunately, not all Pap owners are willing or able to give their dogs the quality attention they need to make them an integral part of the family. These are the dogs that often find themselves relinquished to PCART for fostering and eventual re-homing. Every day, new and wonderful Paps in need of a loving forever home are posted on the PCART website. Anyone who may be thinking about fostering or adopting a Papillon in need can go to the following website and download an application form:

www.pcarescuetrust.org/

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(www.meetup.com/Northern-Virginia-Papillon/) for their contributions to this article.*

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