

History and Development of the Catahoula Leopard Dog

A beginners information guide to this wonderful breed.

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Best Catahoula Dog Training System

1. History and Development.

The Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog evolved in the swamps of central Louisiana around the Catahoula Lake area. Legend states that their ancestors were the result of the Indian dogs, or red wolf, found in the area at that time, mating with the "war dogs", mastiffs used by the Spaniards in battle, that had been left behind, wounded or captured by the Indians. The first white settlers to the Catahoula Lake area found this strange breed of dog with mottled spots and white eyes and called them "Catahoula", meaning beautiful clear water." The dogs were used for hunting deer, bobcat and wild hogs. The settlers appreciated their technique in trailing or winding, baying and herding and soon had the dogs working their cattle.

The Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog was accepted by the American Kennel Club foundation stock registry June 3, 1997. This is **NOT** a full recognition of the breed by the AKC, but is the first step toward that recognition.

2. Vital Statistics

LOUISIANA CATAHOULA LEOPARD DOG

Official UKC Breed Standard

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GENERAL APPEARANCE

The Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog is a medium to tall, rangy dog with a broad chest, strong legs and a wide head. It has slick, short hair. The average adult ranges from 20 to 26 inches in height, measured at the withers. Weight ranges from 50 to 95 pounds.

They are well muscled, yet trim; powerful, yet denoting agility and great endurance.

Any deviation from the ideal is to be judged accordingly and in proportion to the deviation. Structural faults are to be judged more harshly than cosmetic faults.

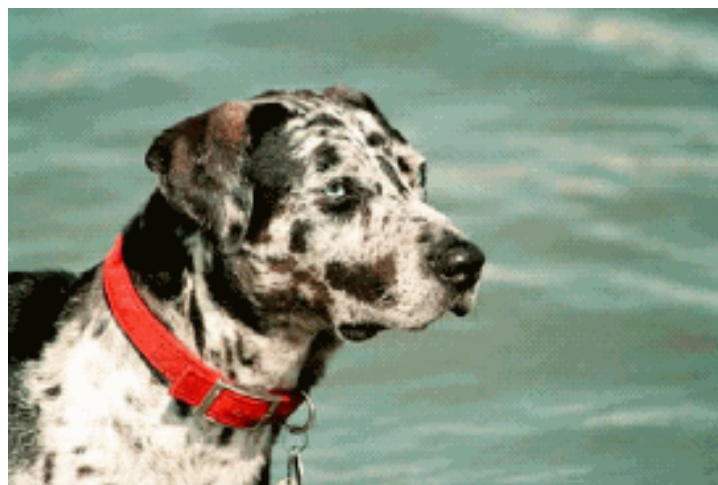
CHARACTERISTICS

Most Catahoulas are spotted, with from two to five different colors in their coat. The coat has a base color of black, blue, brown, liver or white, with contrasting spots of any or all of these colors. A few may be almost solid, but have a white spot on the chest, or rim on the legs and face.

Characteristics of the breed are their unusual eyes, which can be brown, green, "glass" eyes, or one-colored eye with one "glass" eye or eyes with "glass" cracks – spots of white in one or both eyes. The most striking, and preferred, eye color is the unique "double glass" eyes.

HEAD AND SKULL

The head is powerfully built, with a broad top skull and well-developed cheeks. The muzzle is strong and deep, being approximately equal in length to the top skull (measured from the stop to the occiput). When viewed from the front, the muzzle is broad at the base and tapers toward the nose. The well-defined stop is moderate in length.



TEETH – A full complement of strong, white teeth meet in a scissors bite. A level bite is acceptable.

EYES – Glass eyes are preferred, although eyes of any color or combination of colors are acceptable. The eyes do not have to be the same color.

Faults: Malformed or acentric pupils.

EARS – The ears are short to medium in length. The top of the ear is set level with, or slightly below the top of the head. Properly hung ears where the inner edge of the ear lies close to the cheek are preferred. Laid back ears are acceptable.

Faults: Flyaway, hound or cropped ears.

NECK - The muscular neck is of good length.

FORE QUARTERS - The shoulders are well laid back.

FORE LEGS – The upper arm bone (humerus) is of ample length. The length

of the fore legs is 50% to 60% of the height of the dog, measured at the withers. The fore legs are set moderately far apart. The front feet should not toe in or out. Any dew claws present should be uniform. They may be removed.



BODY

The chest is deep, reaching below the elbow. It is fairly broad, with well-sprung ribs. The strong, well-muscled back is level and of medium length. The tuck-up is moderate.

HINDQUARTERS - The slightly sloping croup is medium to long in length.

HIND LEGS – The stifles are well-angulated. The hocks are set low to the ground. When viewed from the rear, they turn neither in nor out. Any dew claws present should be uniform. They may be removed.

FEET

The strong feet are moderate in length. Good webbing between the toes should be evident. Dew claws may be present or removed.

Faults: Cat-footed (up on the toes). Coon-footed (standing on heels).

TAIL

The tail is set medium to high.

Fault: Bob tail



COAT

Coat length is short to medium.

Disqualifying Fault: Long and/or fuzzy coats.

COLOR

The Leopard color may come in blue/gray/black/liver/red/white/patched. Trim may be black/white/tan/red/buff or any combination thereof. Acceptable solid colors include black, red, chocolate and yellow. Some brindle is also acceptable.

HEIGHT

Height is measured at the withers. The height range for males is from 22 to 26 inches. The height range for females is from 20 to 24 inches. **In both sexes, the medium of the extremes is preferred.**

Faults: Undersize or oversize, with the severity of the penalty based on the degree of non-conformity.

DISQUALIFICATIONS

Unilateral or bilateral cryptorchid. Extreme viciousness or shyness.

3. Breed Characteristics

Function The Catahoula was originally bred to round up wild boar in the swamps and wetlands of the south. This task required the dogs to have the unique capability of not only tracking and finding the boars, but also manipulating them to follow the dogs back to the hunters. The herding abilities of the Catahoula became well known among ranchers across the South who began using them on various types of cattle.

The hunting abilities were more widely were also greatly appreciated and the Catahoula became the premier coon dog of the south.

As the breed began to develop in the different regions, the various functions dictated different body styles of the dog. The Texas herding dogs tend to be taller, rangier looking, while the hog dogs of the South are shorter, stockier animals. The dogs bred for hunting tend to be a combination, or more of a medium build. This is partly the reason for the broad variance in the breed standard, as each function has evolved to a different body style.

Personality I have read various descriptions from standards and breed guides that use the words aloof, wary, and suspicious by nature, however, that has not been my experience. The line that my dogs come from can be characterized overall as friendly and outgoing. They are still excellent watch dogs and can certainly be viewed as a deterrent to break-ins, but once a stranger is admitted to the house, they are usually vying for attention from the newcomers. Since I do a lot of conformation showing, a dog with a good personality is extremely important. Dogs that are shy or aggressive should not used in a breeding program.



Structure Key points of the breed standard include a good head style. Neither too thin nor too mastiff-like, good stops; a strong neck that blends to a deep and wide chest; front angulation should be at 45 degrees; straight topline ending in a squared off rear section with the tail set high. The croup should not be curved. There should be good length of loin. There should be good rear angulation with the hocks about a third of the total leg length. Strong rear quarters. Moderate tuck up.

The breed standard states that glass eyes are preferred, however any color or combination of colors is acceptable.

4. Health and Nutrition

Health Issues The primary genetic problems are deafness, eccentric pupils, and hip dysplasia. The deafness is usually found in dogs with 80% or more white on their heads and is related to the piebald gene. This amount of white on the head does not guarantee deafness, but those with more white will be genetically predisposed to this condition. The deafness may manifest itself as partial, total, or directional and Baer testing should be performed on each litter to make sure the pups hearing is sound.

Since this condition is a possibility, the Catahoula owners should begin testing and record keeping to make sure the problem is not occurring in dogs of color. eccentric pupils are mal-formed pupils that may cause a blurred or partially obscured vision in that eye. All pups' eyes should be CERF tested by a vet knowledgeable of this condition.

As far as hip dysplasia, this problem is becoming more and more common within the breed. Only dogs that have good or better OFA or Penn hip rating of .50 or better should be considered for breeding, and then only with another highly rated animal. Few breeders of Catahoulas have this test done and rely on experience and chance to improve their breeding stock, often with disastrous results. The incidence of dysplasia is definitely increasing within the breed and will continue unless breeders are willing to test and certify their breeding stock.

Nutrition These are very strong dogs that thrive on a good quality dry dog food. I have had excellent results feeding my dogs 1 1/2-2 cups of dry food daily, mixed with 1/2 a can of chicken. This amount is enough to sustain good health while keeping them trim. You should not be able to feel fat on the ribs of the Catahoula. Depending on their activity level you may have to increase their intake. If the dogs are kept outside during the winter, they may require more food. Again, gauge this on activity level and temperature.

5. Grooming

The coat on the Catahoula is very tight to the skin. Some have described it as "painted on." In fact, the skin color beneath the coat is identically marked to the coat. This coat requires very little in the way of maintenance, and with regular brushing will stay bright and shiny. We usually do not bathe the dogs more than once a month since bathing removes the natural oils. A good quality shampoo works well, however, I use a color intensifying shampoo before shows. The Catahoula sheds very little, even in the Spring.

If, between baths your dog develops an odor, it probably indicates their anal glands need to be expressed. This is a chore best left to the vet, since they have a neutralizing spray that removes the residual odor.

Nails should be clipped short regularly, being careful not to cut to the quick. If the dog has clear nails this is easy, but if the nails are black, take small cuts until the nail becomes softer. A better method is to walk the dogs regularly on concrete to keep them worn

down.

Teeth should be brushed regularly with pet toothpaste. I recommend the type of brush that is worn on the finger. As in nail care, start this when the dog is a puppy so they become used to the process.

Ears should be cleaned regularly with cotton balls and ear cleaning oil if necessary. If your dog has an odor from the ear, have the vet check it immediately for infection.

6. Breeding Decisions

The basis for a good breeding pair of Catahoulas should be founded in temperament, structure, and natural working ability. The Catahoula is first and foremost a working dog and those abilities should be highly considered in the breeding program. However, a dog with poor structure or a temperament so poor that it cannot be socialized is a poor choice for breeding. The ability of the dog to perform its stated function depends on its structure. Herding dogs must be able to run for hours at a time and still have a reserve of energy to deal with emergencies.

The ideal is to start with a pair of dogs with proven working ability, good structure, and a stable temperament. I have found that breeders who show their dogs will usually have animals with good structure and temperament. Dogs that have received their conformation show championship will



have been graded by many



judges against the breed standard and other dogs, in order to receive that award. By virtue of the fact that show dogs experience many different and unusual environments and must face each with an even temperament or be judged harshly, the chances are better that you will find show dogs with a good attitude

when compared to strictly hunting or working dogs that have received little or no socialization. Their championship certification in our breeding program.

The Catahoula possesses the merle gene. There has been a great deal of study on breeding dogs with the merle gene and unfortunately that research has been mostly

ignored by the majority of the Catahoula breeders. Breeding merle to merle produces washed out colors and increases the risk of producing dogs with the deafness and eccentric pupil problems. A good breeding program includes **solid colored** dogs. Breeding a merle to a solid color dog produces the desired "Blue Leopards" and also produces the occasional solid color. Pups of this combination will have brighter, more vivid markings than those produced from merle to merle breedings.

Again, breeding stock should be BAER, CERF, and OFA or Penn hip tested before breeding. If both parents are acceptable, the final decisions should be based on temperament, and soundness of conformation. The ultimate goal of breeding should be to improve the breed, not just have another litter.

As in all major life transactions, (and a dog is a major life decision) a good contract should be developed by the breeder to provide a health guarantee and limit their liability to the amount paid for the dog should a problem arise. Most contracts will offer either full refund or replacement if the dog has some genetic defect. A good contract will also include a requirement for the pups to be examined by a vet within two weeks. Pups should have been wormed and all shots current before taken to a new home. A health record with the dates of these medications should accompany the pups.

Co-ownership with a breeder is also a popular method of retaining interest in a dog that has conformation show potential. In this arrangement, the breeder may require the dog be shown if it is judged to be show quality upon reaching maturity. Some breeders ask for a small amount for a pup initially, and if the dog turns out to be show quality, may be entitled to an additional amount. The rule of thumb is of course to read the contract, or let the buyer beware.

7. Training - Best Catahoula Dog Training System

The Catahoula is an "alpha" type personality and requires an owner with experience in handling a large, powerful animal. **These are not dogs for the first time owner.** Do not mistake that sweet, blue-eyed puppy for a Labrador.

These dogs have enormous amounts of energy, intelligence, and working abilities that far exceed the normalized breeds most people are used to dealing with. These animals need firm, consistent, and regular socialization, obedience training, and lots of exercise. They are happiest when they have a job to do. The job can be in the form of herding, hunting, obedience training, agility, search and rescue, or just as a jogging companion, but the dog must be given something to do regularly.



Obedience training beginning at 4 months is a must. If you take the time to work with the dog, learn the commands and most of all, become the "alpha" in the home pack, you will be rewarded with a great companion. Do not let the dogs show any aggression toward humans at any time. They will test their position within the household regularly and must understand where they are ranked in the hierarchy. These dogs have a very strong pack instinct and new owners should become knowledgeable on the pack mentality to truly understand the actions of the Catahoula. A thorough understanding of the pack instincts may allow you to defuse potentially threatening situations within the household. This is good knowledge for understanding any dog.

ALL members of the owner's family should participate in the obedience training activities so that the dog understands he must be submissive to them. Typically, only one person attends class, and the dog only responds to that person. Make sure every member of a family understands and can execute basic obedience commands as required.

These dogs make excellent companions for all outdoor sports and can run, jog, rollerblade or bike with you. These are all good exercise for both the owners and the dogs. Make sure they are properly cared for during these activities with the proper gear, and of course plenty of water.

8. Selection Criteria

These are multifunctional dogs, and depending on whether you are looking for a dog for hunting, herding, show, agility, or a pet, you should look for a breeder that participates in that type of activity. Look for a breeder where both parents are on hand. Check the temperament of the parents carefully; although it is no guarantee, they will be a good indication of the pup's temperament.



Catahoula pups play rough, so do not be put off by their roughhousing. Stay away from pups that are too aggressive, or too shy. Spend as much time as possible watching the pups to make this determination. Pick up the pups and turn them on their backs. Pups that will not look at you will not bond readily with people. Pups that wiggle, squirm and will not lay still are usually "alpha" and may be aggressive or difficult to control. Look for a pup that will lay quietly and look up at you as you talk gently to them.

Choose your vet carefully. Since the Catahoula is a rare breed, very few vets will have

experience with them. Although they are very hardy dogs, they will, from time to time require a vet's care. Although I have not had the experience, I have heard from other breeders that the Catahoula does not do well under anesthesia, so mention this concern to the vet if your dog needs this procedure.

The Catahoula matures slowly, is curious, capable, and adventurous. Never underestimate their ability to escape from kennels, crates, or yards. If something attracts their attention they will figure a way to investigate.

9. Sources and Resources

The Catahoula is recognized by several clubs and registries. The [United Kennel Club \(UKC\)](#) recognized the breed in 1997 acknowledged by the AKC.

The [American Kennel Club \(AKC\)](#) has begun registering the breed under their foundation stock services. Acknowledged by any domestic or foreign registry.

The [National Association of Catahoula Leopard Dogs \(NALC\)](#) is the parent Catahoula breed club. This is the oldest and most recognized breed club and most Catahoula's come from dogs recognized by this registry. The NALC sponsors herding trials, hog baying & coon instincts and conformation shows. For more information contact Betty Ann Eaves, PO Box 1041, Denham Springs, La. 70727. (504) 665.6082.

The [American Catahoula Association \(ACA\)](#) is an organization dedicated to uniting owners and breeders of registered Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dogs that also sponsors herding trials and conformation shows. PO Box 316, Williston, OK 74881.

The [Catahoula Owners, Breeders & Research Association \(COBRA\)](#) , PO BOX 248 Abita Springs, LA 70420 is registered as a Single Breed Club operating under the umbrella of the United Kennel Club that protects and advances the research of the Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog.