

What are Rhodesian Ridgebacks like

Ridgebacks are from Southern Africa. They have been developed by crossing lots of breeds, mainly from gundog, terrier and hounds, but mastiff types and indigenous African hunting dogs are in there too! The ridgeback is not an attacking breed; it is bred to track game and then keep it at bay and also to be a loyal companion. They are not guard dogs as such, but will keep a very watchful and protective eye on the family they love.

Ridgebacks are bred for endurance and stamina but should be light on their feet and extremely agile. Being a hunting breed and developed to think for themselves, they will chase anything that runs away, which could cause problems. It is important that time is made available to give them the amount of good exercise they need. Without the stimulation a daily run gives the dog, you may find you have a very bored hound on your hands, and a bored ridgeback can be a destructive ridgeback. These dogs are big and strong in mind and body. If your ridgeback does not respect your authority you may be faced with a problem! Earning a Ridgeback's respect should be a first priority. They can test you to the limits, so you must be prepared to out think your dog. Never lose your temper though, they are not servants and although they are more trainable than most hound breeds, you won't ever get the instant submission you see in a working or gundog breed like the collie or Labrador. Once you have gained a Rhodesian Ridgeback's respect you will have a life long devoted and entertaining companion.

With strangers ridgebacks can be standoffish. Even after a proper introduction a friendship cannot be rushed, but once given it is rarely forgotten. Natural suspicion should not be confused with nervousness. Ridgebacks are playful and love to romp and chase anybody and anything that joins in, and they can play very rough, shoulder barging is a speciality. This can be off-putting to other dog owners in the park, and they may think your dog is aggressive, when all he wants to do is play.

In daily life, most ridgebacks think they are unable to live on an ordinary floor or dog bed, and will try every trick in the book to take over the sofa, or even your bed! Most ridgebacks are gluttons, which makes them notorious thieves; keep your kitchen secure and the butter at the back of the fridge. Ridgebacks are excellent gardeners, you would almost think that they wanted to live in an underground den in the middle of your lawn, instead of on your sofa, and they love rearranging your spring bulbs, and are ready to help with pruning at any time of the year. They can be incredibly lazy and expect to be lifted over the smallest fence; others can outmanoeuvre Houdini. Some have a taste for chewing antique furniture or car interiors; others won't touch the stuff, and stick to seeing how fast they can chase round your legs as you carry in the shopping.

Ridgebacks don't necessarily grow old gracefully but if you have a sense of humour and a love for animals then a ridgeback can be the most rewarding of companions. Loyal to a fault, loving, devoted member of the family, they adore children and hate burglars, are sensitive to your moods, but independent. They can lie around the house for hours or walk for weeks,

there are no short cuts to training a ridgeback, but once over all the hurdles you will be in danger of wanting to do it all over again.

What hereditary problem does this breed have and how can I ensure a healthy puppy?

The breed can be affected with a condition called Dermoid Sinus. This is a problem that can be detected at birth. You should be able to buy a puppy without this problem very easily. However some breeders are either ignorant of the problem or do not know how to check for it. Being told a vet has checked the litter is OK provided the vet knows about the condition and how to detect it. If left undetected, a sinus can become a very big problem and causes a lot of pain and suffering. What looks like a lump, often along the dog's neck and shoulder area (but can be on the head or tail), could be a kind of abscess which can sometimes reach into the spinal cord. With todays modern vet techniques often this can be operated on successfully but this is not always the case. Make sure that your puppy has been competently and regularly checked for Dermoid Sinus.

Although hip dysplasia is not a big problem in ridgebacks, it does occur. Hip dysplasia means that the hip bones are not fully in the sockets. This can sometimes cause a problem early on or can show up much later in a dog's life, it is very painful to the dog and eventually they will be unable to walk. Certain families carry a higher incidence of HD than others do. Check that the parents and hopefully the grandparents of your puppy have been scored, and that they have a low score. The average for the breed is 12 for both hips, and the maximum score for any one dog is 106. The hip score of the parents is now printed on the puppy's KC registration form; if it is not there the parents have not been scored. Breeders can come out with a variety of excuses about why they have not had their dogs checked, but since it is not expensive when you consider the price of a puppy, and can cause great distress to you the owner, as well as your dog, do not accept these excuses.

Being a large breed that grows fast, some puppies can be susceptible to OCD (Osteochondrosis). This is believed to be partly inherited and partly environmental. How you rear your puppy and feed it is very important.

Bitches can be prone to phantom pregnancies; it is wise to have her spayed after her first season if you are not going to breed from her. It is NOT necessary for a bitch to have puppies "for her own good" before she is neutered.

Ridgebacks are as prone as all other dogs to health problems be they mongrels or purebred, in fact sometimes they seem to be too healthy. Give a Ridgeback good food, care and attention, and very importantly, lots of love, and you will have a happy contented dog for many years.

What makes a good breeder?

- A good breeder will sometimes travel many miles to find the ideal mate, not just use the dog round the corner for convenience
- Will not breed from a bitch more than once in a 12 month period.
- Only allow their bitch to have three litters in her lifetime, or, no more than 30 puppies

- Will not breed from a bitch which is less than two years of age or over seven years old.
- Ensure their dogs have a good quality of life, such as a balanced diet, proper housing, correct exercise, socialization and veterinary care whenever it is needed.
- Not sell a dog or puppy to a commercial wholesaler, pet shop or dealer.
- Not breed from a dog or bitch that is likely to pass on hereditary problems, such as hip dysplasia or dermoid sinus.
- Not breed from a dog that suffers from a poor character i.e. a nervous or aggressive temperament.
- Enquire as to your suitability as an owner.
- Offer to take back the puppy should your circumstances change.
- Socialize the puppies while they are with him or her.
- Give help and advice about feeding.
- Be willing to help you with any other problems you may encounter.
- Worm the puppy and have it inoculated if it is old enough as well as offering insurance at the time of leaving the nest.
- Expect you to take the puppy to your own vet for a check up as soon as you get it home so that you are satisfied that you have a healthy puppy.
- Not let the puppy leave the nest until it is at least 7 weeks old and preferably 8 weeks.

In fact a good breeder is generally one who adheres to the Code of Ethics practiced by the members of The Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of Great Britain. This club is striving to stop puppy farming and ensure that individual dogs and the breed as a whole are not exploited, and that the dogs' best interests are kept to the fore. It is entirely up to you which puppy you choose to buy. This information sheet only wishes to help you make an informed choice.

Buying a Ridgeback puppy

Before buying a puppy please consider the following:

COST

Apart from the initial purchase price there will be long term costs to consider

- The weekly food bill
- Bedding and cleaning costs
- Insurance cover
- Veterinary treatment
- Kennel fees when you go on holidays
- Training classes and/or puppy socialization classes which are very important for you and your puppy

TIME

The average lifespan of a ridgeback is about thirteen years, during which your dog will demand a lot of your time and attention

- A well brought up puppy is a joy to own in adulthood. Can you devote time to training him to be such a dog, especially during the first few formative weeks of ownership

- Are your circumstances liable to change in the future and if so, will owning a dog become a problem then?
- Are you going to be away from home for a long time during the day? If so, it might be wiser to wait until you have more time for your puppy.
- Do you go away from home a lot, can you take your ridgeback with you? A ridgeback that is left for long periods of time, in kennels or with different people many easily develop behavioural problems.
- Will you make time during you puppy's early life to take him or her to training classes?
- Will you be able to take him or her for at least one good walk a day? Not just a quick trot around the block!

What do I look for in a Ridgeback puppy?

You can expect to pay a lot of money for a Ridgeback. For your money you want a puppy that is healthy with a well rounded and confident personality, that has been fed well, wormed properly and inoculated, but above all has been well socialized. You should know how to tell whether your puppy is going to be a good or bad temperament and how to avoid buying one that is unhealthy. If you want to show your puppy or train it for agility, tracking and so on, you must look for special qualities, such as sound conformation and correct bite, ridge and markings for the showing, and the right attitude for the other disciplines. If you intend to breed make sure you buy from hip scored parents and that you buy a correctly marked puppy. Remember, the ridge a puppy is born with is going to remain the same for the rest of its life, it does not get longer, wider or more or less crowns, and if the puppy is ridgeless it is never going to develop one as it gets older! Read up on the breed so that you know what you are looking for. The following will help you make up your mind:

- Be prepared to wait for the right puppy.
- Be prepared to say **NO** if you don't like anything you see or hear. Too many people are breeding ridgebacks purely for money, and when this happens temperament often goes out of the window.

What is a well-socialized puppy and why do I need one?

There is an increasing awareness of how to avoid behavioural problems that lead to the thousands of troublesome, fearful, dangerous and unwanted dogs that are abandoned or put to sleep each year. It involves the most fundamental aspect of a puppy's upbringing, which is normally overlooked. You need, at the right age, to make sure puppies can relate to people and other dogs, animals and strange environments. Scientific research has shown that the important time in a puppy's life for socialization is in the period up to 12 to 14 weeks. Puppies are often kept away from stimulation far too long. A puppy obtained from a chaotic, noisy family home is far less likely to be fearful of situations, events and different people than one reared in a barn or kennel. Watch the puppies when you go to visit and collect yours, especially watch them in the company of adult dogs. A puppy that has grown up with a nervous or aggressive dog will learn from its example. Look for a little where the whole litter of pups is confident and contented. See how well they

respond to strangers like you, and see how well they react to odd sounds or objects. Rattle some keys or drop some screwed up paper or even clap your hands. You should expect to see mild response and a quick recovery: fearfulness and no reaction at all is not desirable.

The maxim, be ruled by your head and not your heart is very important! Your heart has to cope with years and years of dog ownership, which should be a pleasure and not a constant worry. Do not accept excuses about not seeing the bitch with her puppies, or about how they were involved in an “accident” which has left a lasting behavioural problem for instance – puppies should be able to get over these things. Do not expect to take your puppy away from the nest before it is at least 7 weeks old at the very earliest, it is learning its manners from its litter mates.

What should I expect to pay for a puppy?

You should pay what you think is right, agree a price with the breeder which is acceptable to you both, ensuring that you are going to receive all the relevant paper work such as Kennel Club registration form, correct pedigree, vaccination certificate (where appropriate) and diet sheet at no extra cost. Breeders will probably issue an insurance certificate which will cover the puppy for its first 6 weeks with you. There will be an option to extend this for a further 12 months, and it is wise to do this, as puppies can be accident-prone. Once the terms are agreed, you should adhere to them.

The Kennel Club registration form should be completed and returned to the Kennel Club as soon as possible to have the puppy’s ownership transferred to you. The Kennel Club permit breeders put certain restrictions on the registration such as “Progeny not eligible for registration” or “Not eligible for issue of an export pedigree”, be sure that you are aware of these at the time you are agreeing to buy the puppy, it may save problems later on. Only the breeder can lift these endorsements. It is usual to purchase a puppy outright.

Arrangements such as breeding terms and partnerships should be fully investigated before being entered into and drawn up in writing and signed by both parties. Do not expect to pay a deposit. Buying a ridgeback is a two-way thing, you have to be satisfied with the puppy you are getting and the breeder has to be satisfied with the home you are providing. What place has a deposit in this transaction? Ask yourself why a breeder would want a deposit, if they do not trust you, why are they selling you a puppy?

The Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of Great Britain recommends ideally that you:

- Buy from a breeder adhering to the club’s Code of Ethics – if they don’t know what that is, ask yourself why don’t they?
- Avoid buying from a pet shop or other retail outlet
- Put your name on your chosen breeder’s list and be prepared to wait. Ask if you can visit and meet MUM before the event.
- INSIST on seeing the mother with puppies
- If unsure about the breed or the breeder, don’t buy
- Visit the whole litter before you finally make up your mind.

- If something seems to be not quite right, for whatever reason, be prepared to say NO.
- Kennel Club registration does not ensure a sound temperament or a healthy puppy; it is up to you to carry out these checks.
- If a puppy does not appear well on collection, do not take it. Make sure it is alert and responsive, shows no signs of illness such as coughing, or has any discharges.
- Remember that a good breeder will want to know just as much about you, and the home you will provide for their puppies – be prepared to be questioned, and do not take offence.

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