

Jane Anderson's Puppy Temperament Scale

The better dog breeders will insist on temperament matching puppies to homes prior to placing them.

At Bluegrace Portuguese Water Dogs, we have developed our own system of categorizing puppies.

We've found this system suitable for classifying our dogs. You may, or may not find this works with other breeds, or even other breeders of PWD's. However, we have found it tends to work well with 90-95% of dogs.

How the scale works

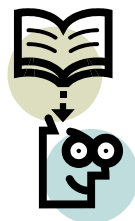
Primarily we show our dogs, breeding irregularly and only with a view to improve the breed. We invariably have a small number of people who are waiting for a pup. We make it clear that we need to ensure the temperament is going to be a right fit.

So when the puppies are growing, we spend a lot of time with them to assess the progress of their temperaments. If we notice a pup is not quite developing as much as we would prefer (invariably being swamped by litter mates), we remove that pup from the pack for 2-5 days, to spend one on one time with a human so they can get the opportunity to see their own temperament exposed. This is an essential part of good puppy rearing.

By the time the puppies are 6 weeks old, we are fairly sure which temperament category the pups fall into.

Then our discussions with our puppy people begin in earnest. We don't believe in letting the puppy pick the owner in most situations. It's pointless having a pup that looks cute, but doesn't fit with the temperament requirements of the home it is going into. Trouble will ALWAYS result. We believe in ensuring pups go to a "permanent" home once. Pups should not have to be re-homed just because of an ill-fitting temperament match right from the start. Such mistakes should never be made.

We will, however, say to people, "we know you want a Category 3 temperament, but the only female we have is a Category 2. " I then explain the implications of this temperament, and how it will affect lifestyle. Our aim is to make sure our puppy people are as well informed as possible.



The Scale

Category 1 - totally "in your face", flies off the ceiling in a single bound. Wants more love than everyone, possibly too much love! Will thrive on obedience training, and test you every step of the way. May or may not eventually settle down into a Category 2 temperament.

Example: Tux, one of our main show dogs, has this sort of temperament. This temperament is not suitable, in our opinion, for inexperienced dog people, or families with young children. Tux is a real handful, and we hoped his excitement would abate as he matured. Whilst it did to a degree, Tux is famous for leaping up and body slamming people as an enthusiastic greeting. When he's wet, this provides an additional level of excitement!

Category 2 - show/working dog temperament, very outgoing and in your face. This pup will need obedience training early on. Good for show homes and people wanting to go running every day with the dog.

Example: We have one of these dogs in a home with two young children, but the dad (our friend Martin) takes her rowing at least once a day, and she is surrounded by schoolchildren a lot of the time, receiving the additional stimulation she thrives on. By the time she gets home she is exhausted and ready to play with the younger children. Normally, I'd prefer to place a Category 3 dog with a family with young children, but this home with the additional outside stimulation, needed the boost up. And she is definitely Martin's dog, and has had a significant impact on his life.

Category 3 - middle of the road, will get on with most people. Good for families. Should be able to fit in to most environments. Will be the sort of dog you can take places (as long as you've taught him/her the necessary manners).

Example: Bella left for her new home, and showed typical Category 3 behaviours. Her owner wanted one of the pups who was a Category 2, based on the other pup looking cuter. On explaining the difference in temperament, the owner agreed Bella was a better fit for her (she lives alone in a unit). Since she's been in her new home, Bella has proven the perfect fit for such, and her owner is absolutely thrilled with her.

Category 4 - shy and possibly fearful, often described as "soft". Noted for sitting behind the owner. Will bond very quickly with one person. Will become a "one-person" dog only. Will rarely move up to a Category 3 dog. Will require extensive careful socialisation. Can make exceptional dogs if placed in the right home. Are sometimes known as "soft" dogs. In the "wrong" homes, these dogs will be a disaster. Suit a one person home best. These are unfortunately common across many breeds.

We actively work to remove all dogs from our breeding program who produce dogs like this.

Example: we had one pup who was a Category 4. We refused to place him until the right home came along, and if that home didn't he would have stayed with me. His new owner loved his nature. I can remember her coming over to look at him, and lying down on my kitchen floor to

gain his trust. I knew this owner was perfect for him as soon as she did that. She worked particularly hard with obedience and socialising to get him on track This has worked out to be a perfect owner-dog match, and we couldn't have asked for better, and the owner is thrilled. This dog is Jed, now Champion Bluegrace Captain Hook. The dog will always be shy, and his mother was spayed as we didn't want to produce such temperaments again. It comes as no surprise that a litter sister to this boy has been diagnose with Addison's disease, given the link between temperament and Addison's.

Can an assessment change?

In short, yes, it can. In our experience, if a pup has experienced a huge shock and/or less than satisfactory treatment, it can drop to a Category 4. Only after considerable appropriate intervention, can this situation be fixed, and then it will never be 100%.

We sometimes see Category 1 and 2 dogs settle down one category on maturation.

Because of the stress of travel, those dogs we send internationally, we aim to send Category 2, so when the dog comes off the flight, they have been able to cope find with the stress of the travel. So far this system has worked very well.

Ratio's in each litter

We have conducted our own analysis on our breeding program. On average, we believe we have 20% of puppies in Category 3. 70% would be Category 2, and 10% would be either Category 1 or 4. As we have no wish to promote a Category 4 temperament, we actively remove those dogs, and the bitches producing such temperaments, from our breeding program. At this stage by our evaluations, no dog since the "C" litter has been of the Category 4 type (see below for more info on this). We're not going to tempt fate with Addison's disease either!

These results are only for my breeding. Different lines of dogs in PWD's will produce different ratios, and different breeds will also have different figures.

When you are selecting a pup, please check with the breeder and get the statistics from their program.

Genetics and temperament

At Bluegrace we actively work to remove dogs from our breeding program that have produced inappropriate temperaments. ie: Category 4. Our third litter, coded by the "C" in front of their name was produced by a bitch from our first litter (the A litter), named Champion Bluegrace Aunty Tess. She produced some Category 4 temperaments. An examples of this is Champion Bluegrace Captain Hook (Jed) However, there is also a direct link with this temperament, and Addison's disease as well. Sometimes when you are a breeder you need to look hard at your breeding program and make the hard call. Whilst it is still possible with lots of work to put championships on dogs such as this, and they can still look absolutely beautiful, you need to go

deeper than skin level when evaluating dogs. Despite passing his health tests, Jed has now been neutered, has finished his show career, and will never be used at stud.

By comparison, when you breed you often have to manage around health issues, which is particularly easier in some respects where the issue is inherited by the simple recessive means. There is no formula for breeding out poor temperaments that we are prepared to use. Despite my considerable experience in showing and breeding dogs, that's not a path I wish to walk down.

Recommended Reading

Jan Fennell's, "The Dog Listener"

Links:

www.bluegrace.com

www.rawlearning.com

www.k9wavelength.com

Email:

janea@tpg.com.au