



Frequently Asked Questions about Border Terriers

We encourage you to print and study these questions, which were thoughtfully prepared by experienced members and breeders in our club. But the answers do not stop here. These points should be thoroughly and openly discussed with the breeders with whom you come in contact during your search for a BT. Remember, just like people, all BTs are different. We want you to be informed of the many aspects and possibilities before you make a decision to become a BT owner.

More information can be found on the BTCA Research page including the Border Terrier in Brief. In addition, there are a myriad of excellent books about Border Terriers, originating from the USA and England, which address these topics. The Library contains a complete listing of these resources.

CAN THE BT BE TRAINED TO STAY IN MY YARD WITHOUT A FENCE AND TO WALK OFF LEASH?

A BT, as is true of any terrier, is an instinctive vermin hunter and, as such, cannot be trusted off leash or in an unfenced-in area AT ANY TIME!! A rabbit or squirrel is enough to send him chasing, which may lead to being lost or hit by a car. This trait seems to worsen with age. A fenced-in yard is ideal, although a kennel run will also contain the BT. Tying him out in the yard is not recommended, because it often leads to constant barking, some aggression, and leaves him open to attacks by other dogs or theft. Invisible fencing is another option, but is only as good as the training you give your dog. Many BTs chose to take the shock in their determination to hunt, and don't return to the yard. An invisible-type fence is best used when you are out in the yard with your dog. If you do not have a fenced-in yard, your dog should ALWAYS be on-leash when outside.

DO BTS SHED?

The BT has a double coat; a soft, downy undercoat and a hard, wiry top coat. Any double-coated dog sheds, but shedding can be minimized with proper grooming. (See grooming question)

ARE THEY ALLERGENIC?

Because of the double coat, the BT may lose dander, which is the cause of allergies from dogs. It is recommended that if you or another family member has pet allergies, you spend some time with BTs before purchasing one. This will help to tell if a reaction will occur. Some people react to saliva and some BTs love to kiss, so your reaction to a lickable dog should also be considered.

ARE THEY GOOD WITH CHILDREN?

The BT is a very sociable breed, and can make an excellent companion for a child. However, their high energy level and rather rough play require constant supervision, especially when puppies are playing with younger children under 7 or 8. This is not only for the child's safety, but the puppy's since some young children may unintentionally harm a puppy. Never get a dog with the intention of teaching a child responsibility. Both children and puppies need an adult caretaker and parents need to accept this before getting a dog. They will take several years of maturity and training to develop into the steady, devoted family member you are hoping for. The greatest concern with children and dogs is that children tend

to leave doors and gates open, and the dog may get out and get lost or hit by a car. Strict rules must be enforced to insure that gates and doors are always kept closed to protect your dog.

HOW LONG DO THEY LIVE?

12-15 years old is the average.

ARE THEY EASY TO TRAIN?

The BT is a willing breed who wishes to please. This makes it easy to train basic house manners such as housebreaking, walking on a leash, leaving garbage alone, leaving clothes and kids' toys alone, not jumping on people or furniture, sitting and staying and coming when called, (barring the presence of a squirrel or rabbit). If your ambitions are to compete in AKC obedience trials, training becomes more challenging, though very rewarding. It is imperative that you search for an instructor who understands terriers, and BTs in particular. Harsh training methods can destroy their will to please and make future training much more difficult. BTs respond best to positive motivational methods using praise, treats and toys.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SHOW AND NON-SHOW PUPPY?

You should tell your breeder if you are looking for a conformation show puppy or a companion/pet puppy. Most good breeders consider ALL of their puppies to be companion puppies, and Border Terrier people will tell you that Borders can do it all-obedience, agility, earthdog, tracking, flyball, therapy dog, etc.. A conformation show puppy is one whose physical characteristics and temperament meet or exceed the requirements of the breed standard. This should be the best specimen of the breed you can find - one with obvious potential. Keep in mind that showing is very time consuming and expensive. Don't be forced into showing if you are not really interested in the hobby.

TO BREED OR NOT TO BREED?

Those Border Terriers who do not have excellent conformation and temperament should NEVER be used for breeding. Breeding is an enormous responsibility, costly, and often heartbreaking. Good breeders make a life-time commitment to each and every puppy they whelp. For most of us, it is best to leave breeding to others and simply enjoy the multitude of pleasures available with our dogs. It is strongly suggested that puppies or dogs that are not going to be shown be spayed or neutered. Spaying or neutering also makes them less prone to certain afflictions associated with their sexuality later in life; for example, mammary tumors or prostate disease. Spayed and neutered dogs can compete in all performance events and trials under AKC rules.

CAN I EXPECT A CONTRACT?

Border Terrier breeders should supply a contract with each puppy or dog sold. The contract should state whether the puppy is being sold as a pet with a limited registration or as a show puppy, with any requirements pertaining to the new owner's show responsibilities outlined therein. A new puppy owner should read the contract fully to know what they can expect of the breeder and what is required of them as the new owner. You should not enter into a contract with which you are uncomfortable. The following is excerpted from the B.T.C.A. Ethical Standards.

The breeder shall provide the following to a new buyer at the time of sale:

Written instructions on feeding, health care, training and grooming.

The BTCA recommends any transfer of ownership of a Border Terrier be accompanied by a written agreement as protection for both the breeder and the new owner. By outlining what is expected of each party, such a contract should help prevent future misunderstandings.

Responsible breeders include in the written agreement a clause that any time the owner cannot keep the dog, the dog is to be returned to the breeder or placed or sold with the breeder's approval of the new owner.

ARE BTS A HEALTHY BREED?

As a breed, BTs are generally healthy. A good diet, proper weight, plenty of exercise, regular grooming and routine veterinary care should keep a BT in good health. One of the reasons the BT is a fairly healthy breed is years of concerned, responsible breeding. Conscientious breeders screen for hip dysplasia and eye problems. Clear dogs can be registered with OFA(hips)and CERF(eyes). Other genetic problems that may occur are heart defects, hypothyroidism, seizures, allergies, malocclusions, luxating patellas and undescended testicles. These defects have not become widespread, however, because of careful, selective breeding by Border Terrier breeders.

WHAT IS THE BT'S ACTIVITY LEVEL?

Border Terriers are active dogs with a high energy level. This should be considered when thinking about a Border and children. Plenty of play and exercise is a necessity for BTs. A long walk or vigorous play within the yard for 20-30 minutes a day will keep your BT happy and fit. Borders also enjoy various activities such as flyball, agility, earthdog tests, tracking and obedience classes. Above all else, your BT likes being with you.

ARE BTS GOOD WITH OTHER PETS?

Generally, the BT should get along with other dogs. If you are making a Border your second dog, it is best to get the opposite sex to the dog you currently own. This will help avoid possible fighting which occurs more frequently between dogs of the same sex. In the case of cats, if introduced at a young age, they can live together harmoniously, but never trust them with outside cats or neighborhood cats that wander into your yard. A BT will view gerbils, guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits, birds and other small, caged pets, as vermin to be hunted. Therefore, they really cannot be trusted around such creatures. Make certain that any critter's cages are well out of the reach of a BT. After all, a BT was bred to hunt, making it important to recognize and accept this characteristic if you wish to acquire a BT.

DOES THE BORDER TERRIER BARK A LOT?

Although each puppy is different, most BTs are not yappy. They will keep an eye on things, and let you know if someone is at the door or walking by. Most dogs of any breed will bark if bored, left alone too much, or improperly exercised. Many can be taught not to bark.

ARE BTS EASY TO HOUSEBREAK?

The BT is a very willing breed who wishes to please, making basic housebreaking easy to train. As with any puppy, frequent trips outdoors are in order, and puppies should always be crated or confined in a safe area when unattended. Consistency and a routine are extremely important in housebreaking. Your puppy should be taken out frequently especially after eating, drinking, playing and sleeping. Accompanying your dog outside will assure that he has done what you expected and hasn't gotten distracted by a leaf or some other object in the surroundings. Often, if a puppy is left out alone, he will be so anxious to come in again, that he will try to finish quickly and not completely empty his bladder causing an accident shortly after returning inside.

SHOULD I CRATE TRAIN?

YES! Not only is a crate a useful housebreaking tool, but it gives your Border (both young and old) a place to call home and get away from it all. Young puppies often need a break from zealous young owners, and as long as you don't use the crate for punishment, crating your dog for brief periods gives you a break as well. Additionally, a crate provides a safe environment for a Border in the house, car, hotel rooms and even airplanes. An open crate in the house gives the dog a safe den. Even very young children can learn to respect the dog's bedroom.

DOES THE BT REQUIRE A LOT OF GROOMING?

Borders are not a high maintenance breed, but they do need more grooming than some books on choosing a dog indicate. The Border is usually hand stripped twice a year, and should be brushed weekly. Hand stripping involves pulling out the dead outer coat by hand, or with the help of a stripping tool. You may choose the natural look, doing nothing to the BT's coat except brushing it. With this cocoa-mat look the Border can be mistaken for a scruffy mixed breed, and the coat may shed more as it ages. A few pet owners opt to have their pets clipped. Clipping is not a recommended method of grooming since it does not remove the dead hair, but merely shortens it, softening the texture, fading the color, and encouraging noticeable shedding. There are booklets and videos available on properly grooming your Border Terrier.

HOW DO I FIND A GOOD BREEDER?

The Border Terrier in Brief, the Ethical Standard for Breeders and the AKC Questions to Ask Your Breeder are all useful resources

The BTCA also provides a online breeder directory which contains breeders and other helpful Border Terrier owners who all belong to the BTCA.

WHICH MAKES THE BEST PET...MALE OR FEMALE?

Any BT bought as a pet quality puppy should be spayed or neutered when old enough. Males are just as sweet-natured as females and females just as determined as males. If you have one dog already, it is usually advisable to get the opposite sex as a companion.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST DRAWBACK / NEGATIVE OF THE BT?

A BT is not for people who want a dog 'some of the time'. Borders who are not part of the family are not happy. Left unattended in the yard, they will bark and/or dig out usually getting hit by a car. BTs were bred to hunt vermin, therefore, do not go well with small, furry animals such as gerbils and guinea pigs. It would not be easy to tell a child why his dog killed his pet hamster.

Also, because they were bred to hunt, they should NEVER BE ALLOWED OFF LEAD IN UNSECURED AREAS. Many Borders have been killed by cars chasing after a squirrel or rabbit.

Their coats require some above-average maintenance to keep the properly groomed double coat you see in illustrations of the breed.