The Whippet

Or as we say, that most deviously cunning of all living things! My late father-in-law, who had been a whippet breeder before I met him, on realising that we were considering buying our first whippet puppy drew me to one side and said, “Derek, do you realise what you are about to take on? They are the most efficient sneak thieves known to mankind”. These words of wisdom did not stop us and our first puppy was acquired soon after. With the benefit of twenty seven years of hindsight and seven whippets later, all I can say is that nothing happened to contradict his view point!

So, what makes us so fond of the endearing little rascals? Let’s look at some aspects of The Whippet......

# The Furniture

An odd choice of first heading you may think, but it was my introduction to the breed when our first puppy, Alex, arrived home. We were, in those days, living in our first house in Fleet which had a through lounge (front to back that is). On the way to collect him I had said “There is no way this dog is going to be allowed on the furniture.”. Maureen smiled a knowing smile. I should have been paying attention!

So we arrive home and bung the puppy out for a pee, show him where the water dish is and move through to the lounge. We were sitting on the sofa at the front end of the room. He came and put his front paws on the seat of the sofa and his little back legs were going round in a blur like cartoon animals in his attempts to join us. It was clear he was far too small and weak to jump up, but we gently pushed him down and said “No” every time he tried.

Eventually it was time to eat and we retired to the back end of the room safe in the knowledge that we could get on with eating without keeping an eye on Alex as he was clearly no threat to the furniture. At the end of the meal I looked round to see what Alex was doing. What Alex was doing was being curled up asleep on the sofa! Which is pretty much where he stayed for the rest of his life. A first lesson in keeping an eye on the little so and sos.

Over the years, at many events, we met loads of fellow whippet owners. To a man, and a woman, they all fell over laughing at the idea that I ever thought they could be kept off the furniture! The problem, you see, is that they are seriously fast and quiet on their feet, and determined to get their own way no matter how many times you scoot them off. In the time it takes to look away and look back they are curled up asleep on the furniture. So you quickly realise that you can resign yourself to a lifetime of scooching the little sods off the furniture every 10 seconds, or you can give up. There is only one sensible decision!

But then having a whippet head permanently attached to your leg is something you get used to. And it is so relaxing to be sat there in front of the TV stroking the dog!

# Food

Do you remember what my father-in-law said? Yup. You think you have left the cooling cake in a dog proof location? Wrong! There was a picture in one of the of the breed magazines of a small bitch, who despite her size, had found her way onto the kitchen worktop and was on her hind legs helping herself to the milk jug on the third shelf on the wall!

One couple we knew via the racing scene never had children, and yet they had kiddie locks on their fridge. Want to guess why?

Our own dear Alex, whilst we were involved with dog shows, was with us at the local show training club’s Xmas bash. We were talking to the lady who was the organiser (it would have to be her). She was holding a glass of wine in one hand and a biscuit in the other. Eventually, she went to eat her biscuit, but her fingers were holding nothing. She never felt it go. Alex was standing quietly by my side looking totally innocent (yeah right!).

# What use is a whippet?

## Guard dog

The attitude of a whippet to a stranger coming into the house is “yee hah, someone new to play with, come in and rub my tummy”. This is of course totally useless for guarding purposes.

## Herding dog

“Oh look, something furry is running away. That’s my cue to chase it”. This is of course totally useless for herding purposes.

## Showing dog

Yes, you can show a whippet! Yee hah, something it **can** do. But if you walk around any dog show and try to find which breed exudes a general air of “this is SO boring” guess which one it will be? You might suspect they are generally looking around wondering “Where do they keep the bunnies? When do I get to chase a bunny?”.

## Obedience Competitions

At one time it was thought that the words “whippet” and “obedience” were oxymorons. However, of recent years, some complete masochists have taken to training whippets to take part in Obedience competitions. They manage to compete in lowest level with a modicum of success, which is more than anyone expected. The problem with doing this is the whippet’s insistence of having his own interpretation of absolutely everything.

For example, consider the test where the handler gives the “lie down” command and moves to the opposite side of the arena. What the judges are looking for, apart from the dog staying put, is that it should be watching the handler alertly for the next command. Many whippets however, once lying down, figure that that means they should roll over on their backs with their legs in the air and go to sleep. This is, of course, not what the judges are looking for!

If you watch a whippet moving around the obedience ring you will note they keep looking up at the handler. You might think that this is good and they are looking for further commands. Now look really carefully. Look at the expression. It clearly says, “We’re doing this again! Why are we doing this? Where do they keep the bunnies? When do I get to chase a bunny?”.

So, they are not totally useless this time, just mainly useless.

## Agility Competitions

Mainly useless. The comments above for Obedience are pretty much the same here.

## Guide dog

Needs a high level of obedience so guess what?

## Companion dog

Now here is something they are good at it. Whippets are very people friendly, very children friendly. They have no concept that anybody could fail to like them. Which is why it is particularly saddening when one of them ends up with a bad owner.

About 15 years ago some friends were visiting. We had four whippets at that time. One of them was pretty scared of dogs but seeing a friendly welcome, she gritted her teeth, came in and sat in an armchair looking nervous. Now you need to realise that whippets are not like cats. When settling down they don’t always walk round in circles first. In fact, given their speed and agility, they are quite capable of jumping onto a person’s lap and starting to curl up in mid-air, landing on your lap already curled up and asleep! It happens before you realise what is happening. So after about 15 minutes, I turned from talking to one friend to see how Tracy was getting on and there she was, with our smallest whippet curled up on her lap nervously stroking it. They get through to most people!

## Sleeping dog

This is what whippets do best. They are such active dogs when they are awake that they burn off so much energy that they have to spend most of their time recovering by sleep.

One has to aware though, that you need to be aware of whether their eyes are fully closed, their ears not cocked, because one of a whippet’s standard con tricks when stealing food, or whatever, is to appear to be sleeping whilst planning their next devious move.

We survived over twenty years without letting the dogs into our bed at night. In the mornings I would be awoken by Maureen opening the doors and letting the dogs bounce all over me and diving under the duvet. That’s far more effective than an alarm clock. They would then stay there for most of the day unless it was walking or feeding time or “needing out” time. Some of the time they would wander down and join us on the sofa, asleep of course. But after whippet #6 had to be put down, number 7, Arry, was alone dog wise for the first time in his life. For some reason this didn’t seem to affect him for the first two weeks. Then I was awoken in the middle of the night by BANG ---- BANG ----- BANG etc. It turned out to be Arry hurling himself against the kitchen door to the hall! I got up, went down, calmed him down, went to bed, and then BANG ---- BANG ----- BANG. Repeat the process. BANG ---- BANG ----- BANG. Repeat the process. BANG ---- BANG ----- BANG This couldn’t go on, so I went back to bed but leaving the doors open. Arry followed, dived under the duvet and stayed there every night for the rest of his life.

Comparing notes with other whippet owners, the reply was “What? You managed as long as that before you let them upstairs at night? That’s a lot longer than we did”.

## Walking dog

When walking on the road it is essential to keep them on a very short lead. If they see something like a cat on the other side of the road, they won’t stop to think they will immediately dive for it. If the dog is on a long and/or loose lead that dive could be taking him into the path of a car. Even when off road you need to have an eye out for the local fauna, because one sight of such and the dog will be off and won’t come back until it has caught the animal or lost it.

Even when they are not chasing, getting them to come back can be problematical. For instance, you are at one side of a field, the dog has scooted off to the other side and is sniffing around for all the disgusting things that dogs sniff around for, as well as small furry animals. You want to go so you call the dog. The dog, with total obedience to your call will look over his shoulder at you. However, that does not mean the dog is coming back, it means “OK gotcha boss, and I’ll be back just as soon as I’ve finished doing this.”.

Unless you can find a large enclosed area it is best to keep them on the lead. They are seriously good at disappearing. They also play hard with other dogs. This is harmless play but some dogs, or worse their owners, can get quite needlessly hysterical.

If they end up loose with a greyhound it is quite comical. Whilst in general a greyhound will win a race against a whippet (greyhound is 5mph faster flat out) that is not true for the first 50 yards, because the whippet can accelerate faster being lighter. So the whippet starts to run and pulls away. The greyhound takes off in pursuit. At around the 50 yard mark the whippet drops its shoulder, somersaults, and sets off in the opposite direction, all in the blink of an eye. Meanwhile the greyhound is visibly going “What? Where did it go?” and is desperately trying to slow its much bigger frame down as it is too big to do the somersault trick. Run 50 yards in the other direction and the same happens. They happily do this until they are both totally knackered.

Throwing games are a bit different to other dogs. You throw a stick say and what happens will be one of the following:

1. The dog stands by your side with a look that says, “that was a perfectly good stick why did you throw it away?”
2. The dog chases the stick, lies down and chews it, “it’s mine now, and I want to chew it here”
3. The dog chases the stick, brings it back but refuses to let go, “look, you were the one who threw it away, if you wanted it you shouldn’t have thrown it away”
4. The dog plays the game, this very rarely happens

You can’t fault the dog’s logic!

## Fly Ball

Given all of the above it would seem logical to assume that whippets would be no good at this too. But remember they have their own logic! It seems they are really good at Fly Ball! I have never tried and hence have no idea how to get whippets to do this, so if you are a whippet fly baller, please drop me a line so I can update this!

## Racing Dogs

Now this is really what the dogs enjoy most. They are built to chase, it is what they want to do. You only have to hear their excited barking or watch the way they try to heave their way to the traps, the way they jump into the traps, and of course the single minded way they chase the lure.

It is a purely amateur sport. All the dogs are pets first, racers second, so they will see out their retirement days as pampered whippets.

The sport is typical of many English country sports, a bunch of people standing in the middle of a field in the wet and windy and swearing blind that they are having fun. The walking side of the training can be similarly unpleasant!

Some idiots who don’t know what they are talking about think there is some cruelty involved. There is none. We all love our dogs and wouldn’t do anything bad to them. Like I said they are family pets, with all that that implies.

## Lure coursing dog

This is a replacement for the now banned sport of hare coursing. The dogs love it just as much as racing. And yes, field, rain, wind etc! But the dogs do it for the same reasons that they race.

# Conclusion

So there you go. They are lovable, self-centred, thieves and rascals. It won’t surprise you either to learn that given the number of non standard behaviours listed above, whippet owners refer to two distinct types of animal, whippets and dogs, but then we are rather biased.