



## SO YOU WANT TO BUY A LABRADOR PUPPY?



### Characteristics and Temperament

The main characteristics of Labradors are their coat, tail, head and temperament. They have a double coat: a soft downy undercoat that keeps them dry and warm in cold water and a hard outer coat that helps them repel water. Even though their coat is short it is very dense; Labs shed a lot of hair when they moult. Their tail, best described as an otter tail, is thick at the base and tapers to a narrower point. Their head is clean cut and somewhat broad, with hanging ears. Their expression is alert and intelligent and conveys a kind, friendly temperament. Their best feature is their temperament. Labs are loving, people oriented dogs. They are happiest when they are with you. Labs are retrievers and will bring you things they find lying about your house and yard. They tend to be quite patient with children and wonderful family dogs, they are not guard dogs. They may bark protectively but will generally not act more aggressively. Labs are wonderful people dogs more likely to lick someone to death than hurt them. They tend to be stable, not easily upset by strange things or occurrences. They will take many things in their stride. Because they are such social creatures, they need company and consistent training early in their lives, otherwise they can become very destructive and badly behaved, through boredom and lack of boundaries.

Labradors come in three colours: black, chocolate and yellow. Yellow Labradors are often mistakenly called Golden Labradors. The term yellow refers to a range of colour from nearly white to gold to fox red. The Golden Retriever is a separate breed from the Labrador Retriever although there are similarities. There is no such thing as a Silver Labrador – don't be tricked into considering purchasing something promoted as a Silver Labrador.

### Parents

You will probably be able to see the mother of the puppies. It is often not possible to see the father as breeders usually use stud dogs owned by other breeders. It goes without saying that if you don't like the parents, don't buy one of their offspring! The mother should be happy and friendly – not nervous or suspicious- although she will not look her best after having raised a litter of puppies. It is worth noting that in Labs two yellow parents can only have yellow pups while if one or both of the parents is black the pups can be any colour and sometimes all three colours appear in the one litter.

The Labrador is a breed where differences between the sexes are minimal. In general males tend to be slightly taller (2-3 cm) and heavier with broader heads. Temperament variation is more significant between individual dogs than between the sexes.

### Registration

Dogs Victoria keeps the records of all dogs registered going back many generations. Labrador Retriever puppies born from registered pure bred parents that have been hip and elbow scored are the only puppies eligible to be registered. The Registration Certificate/Certified Pedigree must be given to the buyer after the puppies are sold. Sometimes puppies are advertised as pure bred/no papers and this means they are not registered with DV. Such puppies may well include dogs other than Labradors in their family tree. The advantage of buying a DV registered puppy doesn't only relate to being able to show or breed the dog; it means that there have been many years of consideration given to the quality of the dogs that are the forebears of the puppy and you will have much more certainty as to the temperament and physical soundness of the pup.

### Inherited Diseases

At present in the Labrador Retriever the most identified inherited diseases are hip dysplasia (HD), elbow dysplasia (ED or OCD), some eye diseases and exercise induced collapse. Unfortunately it is not possible to be certain that any puppy will not have an inherited disease, except in the situation where there is a DNA test for that particular disease. Many inherited abnormalities only show up in mature or advanced age. Some inherited diseases may occur even after generations of breeding from sound stock. It is important to understand that while HD and OCD have an inherited component they can also be influenced by environmental conditions in which the puppy is reared e.g. inappropriate feeding and over exercise.

Fortunately there are now DNA tests available for the eye disease Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) and the relatively recently understood Exercise Induced Collapse (EIC). The DNA test will determine a dog's genetic status regarding this recessive disease; i.e. normal, carrier or affected. Therefore if one of the parents is certified DNA normal/clear for either disease, then it is guaranteed that none of its progeny will develop that disease. It is worthwhile seeking out breeders that utilise these tests.

There are other eye diseases, including cataracts and retinal dysplasia, that breeders should test their breeding stock for. The breeder should provide up to date (within last eighteen months) clear ACES (Australian Canine Eye Scheme) certificates for the parents of the litter.

## Where To Buy

It is in your interest to purchase your puppy from a breeder who tests and breeds to reduce inherited diseases. Parents of all DV registered puppies must be hip and elbow scored. You should request copies of the hip and elbow certificates for both parents.

The main disadvantages of pet shops and dealers are the uncertainty of parentage and lack of testing of parents for inherited diseases, lack of knowledge about parents' temperaments and the adverse effects of spending days or even weeks in a confined space. Also remember that many puppies that are sold through pet shops are bred in intensive puppy farm situations; not something you would want to support.

Breeders should provide:

- (a) Original signed DV registration certificates (main or limited register);
- (b) Copies of parents' hip and elbow certificates; also preferably ACES certificates and PRA and EIC DNA results;
- (c) Diet Sheet;
- (d) Vaccination certificate and worming details.

It is in both the breeder's and purchaser's interest that the puppy is sold under a Sales Agreement which clearly defines both party's responsibilities and obligations.

## Explanation of Certificates

**The lower the score, the better the hips and elbows.** The breed average for Hip Dysplasia is currently approximately 9 (i.e right hip 5, left hip 4, or right hip 3 left hip 6 etc) Evenness of score is more desirable, 0:0 being the best score. Elbow xrays are graded 0, 1, 2 and 3, the best grade being 0. It is not recommended to breed from dogs with elbow scores of Grade 2 or higher.

Ask also for an ACES eye certificate which will be an examination record from a veterinary ophthalmologist: all the ticks should be in the *negative* or not affected column. To be current it should have been issued within the past 18 months.

## Alternatives

Young puppies are very demanding and not everyone is in the position to provide up to four meals daily and lots of attention. Older pups or mature dogs are often available from breeders and can be a good choice for working people or busy families with young children. Labradors are so adaptable that they usually settle easily into a new family at any age.

## Further Information

The Labrador Retriever Club is always willing to provide advice and guidance regarding the purchase, rearing and training of Labrador pups. Don't hesitate to contact the Club for any assistance.

**LRCV Facebook page** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/labvic/>

**LRCV Website** <http://www.labvic.org.au/>

