

So, you think you want a Malamute...

ARE YOU NUTS?!?!? Oh, you are..... okay then, join the club! After all, who in their right mind would want to share their life with a strong-willed, intelligent, independent dog who's capable of moving 2,000 pounds... all by herself? Surprisingly, there are quite a few of us out there. We're recognizable by our hoarse voices (from trying to get our dogs' attention), our long left arms (from hanging onto the leash), and assorted bumps and bruises (from our dogs' exuberance). Of course, we also share our life with a friend who can join us in all sorts of activities, who is always ready to listen to our problems and who has an unlimited supply of affection. All in all, we gain more than enough from our Malamutes to justify the inevitable headaches.

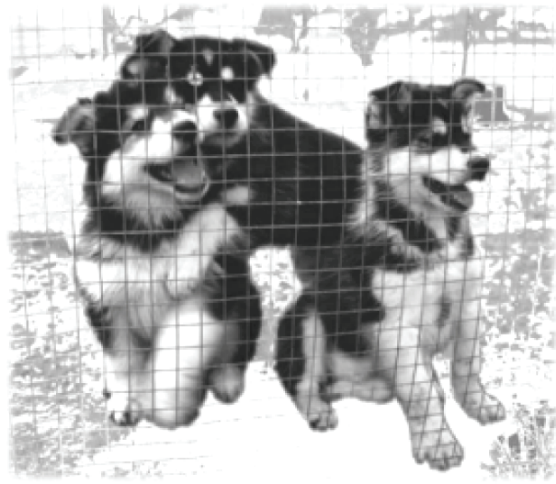
Still, before you acquire a Malamute, it's important that you understand them fully, so you can make a well-informed decision about whether or not you are interested in meeting the challenges of living with one (or two, or three....) of these magnificent animals.

Malamutes have an average lifespan of between 10 and 12 years. Before acquiring any dog, you must be prepared to make a commitment to providing that pet with a stable home for its whole life. As a rule, if you can't say with a reasonable degree of certainty what you will be doing for the next several years, and that you will be living in an environment which can accommodate a large dog, perhaps it might be best to wait until things are a bit more settled.

Malamutes are beautiful, striking dogs and many people want to have one for that reason alone. It is vital that you look past the pretty face to the type of dog who comes with it. Malamutes are stubborn, friendly, independent, energetic, intelligent, dominant and possess a highly developed sense of pack hierarchy. Fanciers of the breed cherish all of these traits, but many people find living with them too difficult. The time to figure out which group you are in is before you acquire a Malamute. There are so many different breeds of dogs that there is absolutely no excuse for choosing one whose temperament and needs will not fit in with yours.

Malamutes are Pack Animals

Malamutes' natural dominance and sense of pack



hierarchy can get them into lots of trouble. A Mal's human family becomes her pack, and she must learn everyone's place in that pack. Her owners' job is to teach her that her place is at the bottom of the hierarchy — that every person, from the smallest child on up to the adults, ranks above her. The lessons are quite simple to teach to a young pup and, done properly, will last a lifetime. However, if her family does not understand the need to establish their leadership at a very early age, the Malamute will quite happily assume the dominant (alpha, leader) role in the family. This can lead to problems with dominance aggression and is a leading cause of unwanted Mals being euthanized or abandoned at shelters.

Malamutes Are Intelligent, Independent Thinkers

Many people believe that Malamutes are stupid, and untrainable. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Mals are very intelligent. Of course, this, coupled with their independent nature and high level of dominance, makes training them a real challenge. They learn very quickly, but when it comes to basic obedience, their favourite question is "why?". They just don't believe that they were put on this earth to please people, so owners need to find other ways to motivate their pets.

As we have said, training must begin at a very early age, and her first lessons must teach your pet her place in your family. A wise owner will make a real effort to keep training fun and interesting — nothing turns a Mal off faster than constant repetition of the same boring routine. And training is never complete — it is a lifelong task. Are you prepared?

Training can, and should, be very successful, if you approach it with enthusiasm and an open mind. All Mals can learn to respond reliably to some basic commands, and a few even excel at competitive obedience.

Malamutes Need A Job

Malamutes are working sled dogs, bred with the ability to pull heavy loads all day, every day. Today, many people do competitive weight pulling with the Mals — in condition, an average-size Mal is capable of pulling over 2,000 pounds... all by herself! As you can imagine, these canine athletes have a tremendous amount of energy and a desire to be very active. Owners must provide an outlet for this energy. The list of activities you can enjoy with your Mal is vast: sledding, skijoring, weight pulling, back packing, hiking, swimming (sometimes — most Mals don't really like the water), agility, jogging, biking, roller blading, carting. The only given is that you must provide serious daily exercise for your Malamute — a walk around the block just isn't enough!

Malamutes who do not get adequate exercise quickly become bored and frustrated. They will exhibit all sorts of undesirable, destructive behaviours: excessive digging (a certain amount is normal for northern breeds), barking, howling, self-mutilation, inappropriate chewing, destruction of property. They are also somewhat more likely to try to escape from whatever enclosure they are in when outside — in this case, the grass probably is greener on the other side!

Good Fences Are A Must

This brings us to the next subject. Malamutes are notorious roamers if left loose. And a Malamute out on the town is not a good neighbour! She will harass



Cute fluffy Malamute puppies quickly grow into large, powerful dogs.

and may fight with other dogs. She may kill cats or small dogs, and might harass and possibly kill livestock and wildlife. She can also destroy property and may frighten people, especially children, who are not accustomed to these dogs who, to them, look like wolves. A loose Malamute is also at considerable risk herself: traffic, larger animals, skunks, garbage dumps and irate neighbours (who, in rural areas, generally have the right to shoot any animal harassing their livestock) all pose a risk.

If you are going to have a Malamute, it is absolutely **essential** that you keep your pet physically under control at all times. Ideally, she will be securely fenced in anytime she is outside by herself. When you exercise her, do it on leash or in harness. Few Mals can be trusted off leash, and such dogs are the exception, so you should count on keeping your Malamute safely under control at all times.

Malamutes Are Not Guard Dogs

Malamutes do not make good guard dogs. They lack the strong protective instincts which are present in the breeds who do guard work. Although their size and appearance can act as deterrents to people who are not familiar with the breed, Malamutes simply like people too much to be effective guard dogs. Most Mals would welcome a burglar, fix him a meal, show him where all the good stuff is and make sure he got away before the family arrived home!

Malamutes Are Big Dogs

Physically, Malamutes are a medium-large breed. Males, on average, weigh about 85 pounds; females about 10 pounds less. The range stated in the first breed standard, which was based on the original working Malamutes brought south during the 1920s and 1930s, was from 65 to 85 pounds for males and 50 to 70 pounds for females.

Hereditary Problems Within The Breed

Mals are generally quite healthy and, with good preventive care, can enjoy long and relatively problem-free lives. However, there are a number of illnesses which you should be particularly aware of, including: hip dysplasia, chondrodysplasia, hereditary eye disease, hypothyroidism, epilepsy, autoimmune disease, allergies. There are registries which will certify dogs to be free of the first four (in the case of hereditary eye disease, breeders living in remote areas may not have access to veterinary

ophthalmologists and may instead give you a signed statement from their veterinarian). You will have to rely on the breeder's integrity concerning the presence of any other problems in their lines. Of course, breeding dogs who are free of recognized disorders only reduces the chance of their offspring being affected — unfortunately the risk is never completely eliminated.

Malamutes Require Grooming

Grooming requirements for Malamutes are moderate. Their double coat looks magnificent, and needs to be brushed and combed regularly to keep it that way. Once or twice each year (spring, and sometimes, fall) Mals "blow" their coats — lose their fine, dense undercoats. At this time, daily raking (of the dog, not the yard!) will help to speed the process and cut down on the mess. Daily vacuuming also helps, but your house will still be snowy white for several weeks.

Mals stay relatively clean — their harsh guard coat sheds dirt quite effectively. However, they do need to be bathed occasionally. She must be well combed out first (any mats in the coat will harden after washing and become very difficult to remove), washed with dog shampoo and rinsed thoroughly (rinsing will take several times longer than washing).

Your Mal's toenails should be trimmed regularly, to help prevent splayed feet and the possibility of injury and infection if toenails (especially dewclaws) are allowed to grow into the dog's flesh. Mals' erect ears are not prone to problems; regular checking is generally all that's needed. Tooth decay and gum disease are leading causes of illness in older dogs, but both can be largely prevented with regular cleaning. Daily brushing, using special "doggy" toothpaste is best, but two or three times a week is usually adequate. Feeding dry food and providing lots of hard chew toys helps, but there is no substitute for regular cleaning.

The Cost Of Owning A Malamute

On a very practical level, consider the cost of keeping and caring for a large dog. During the first year, this can reach \$2,000 very easily: purchasing the puppy, chew toys, completing puppy shots, chew toys, spaying/neutering, feeding, chew toys (they go through a lot of



chew toys during that first year, and the toys are cheaper than replacing your furniture), obedience classes, assorted paraphernalia (collars, leads, bowls, grooming gear, crate, harness, sled, skijoring belt, etc.), license tags, heartworm prevention, a couple of visits to the vet for minor problems, books, club memberships and so on..... After the first year, the average cost for basic feeding and preventive veterinary care is about \$500 to \$750 per year. The cost of different activities varies widely. And, of course, an accident or serious illness can easily generate veterinary expenses in four figures.

Adopting an Adult Malamute from the AMHL

Most Malamutes that come into rescue are healthy and loving animals, but some may need help learning how to behave due to neglect, abuse, lack of socialization, and training. These malamutes often require an adjustment period of several months as well as extra precautions if you have children and other dogs. Learn all you can about the breed and about your self before adopting — adoption is for a lifetime!

So, there you have it — a very brief overview of life with a Malamute. If you welcome and can meet the challenges of living with one of these energetic, intelligent and headstrong critters, wonderful! We strongly urge you to read more brochures and complete an Application to Adopt a Malamute from the AMHL.

If, however, you have reservations about your desire or ability to live with a Malamute, we hope that you will continue to research different breeds of dogs until you find the one that's perfect for you. There are hundreds of choices available, both purebreds and mixed breeds. Rest assured that there is a perfect choice for every dog lover!



Other HELP League Publications:

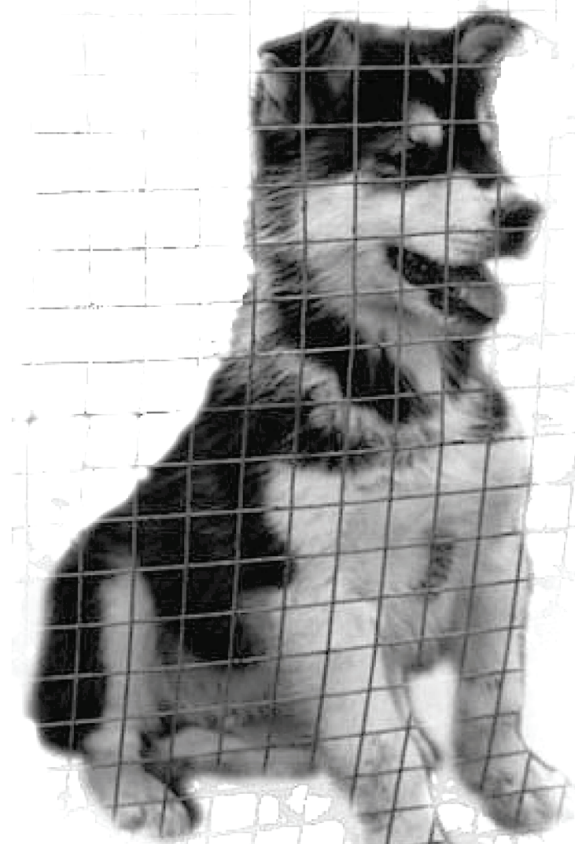
*Because Dogs Are For A Lifetime...
Choosing The Right Breeder
You Can't Keep Your Dog—or Can You?
You Wanted To Know...*

About Malamute Rescue...

The Alaskan Malamute HELP League came into being when responsible Malamute breeders and concerned owners got involved in finding homes for pets when owners were no longer able to care for their dogs. In addition to rescue, assessment and placement of adoptable dogs, the HELP League also provides education and information for Malamute owners and runs a foster-dog program for dogs which cannot be placed.

For more information about Malamute rescue, please visit the web site of the Alaskan Malamute HELP League at:

www.malamuterescue.com



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