

# VOLHARD'S PUPPY APTITUDE TEST

## WHAT IS PUPPY TESTING?

Some of the tests we use were developed as long ago as the 1930's for dogs bred to become Guide Dogs. Then in the 1950's, studies on puppies were done to determine how quickly they learned. These studies were actually done to identify children's learning stages.

*Top Dog Tips: The ideal age to test the puppy is at 49 days of age when the puppy is neurologically complete and it has the brain of an adult dog. With each passing day after the 49th day the responses will be tainted by prior learning.*

Later on, in the early 60's more tests were developed to determine if pups could be tested for dominance and submission. These tests determined that it was indeed possible to predict future behavioral traits of adult dogs by testing puppies at 49 days of age. Testing before or after that age affected the accuracy of the test, depending on the time before or after the 49th day.

We took these tests, added some of our own, and put together what is now known as the Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test, or PAT. PAT uses a scoring system from 1-6 and consists of ten tests. The tests are done consecutively in the order listed. Each test is scored separately, and interpreted on its own merits. The scores are not averaged, and there are no winners or losers. The entire purpose is to select the right puppy for the right home.

The tests are as follows:

1. Social Attraction - degree of social attraction to people, confidence or dependence.
2. Following - willingness to follow a person.
3. Restraint - degree of dominant or submissive tendency, and ease of handling in difficult situations.
4. Social Dominance - degree of acceptance of social dominance by a person.
5. Elevation - degree of accepting dominance while in a position of no control, such as at the veterinarian or groomer.
6. Retrieving - degree of willingness to do something for you. Together with Social Attraction and Following a key indicator for ease or difficulty in training.
7. Touch Sensitivity - degree of sensitivity to touch and a key indicator to the type of training equipment required.
8. Sound Sensitivity - degree of sensitivity to sound, such as loud noises or thunderstorms.
9. Sight Sensitivity - degree of response to a moving object, such as chasing bicycles, children or squirrels.
10. Stability - degree of startle response to a strange object.

During the testing make a note of the heart rate of the pup, which is an indication of how it deals with stress, as well as its energy level. Puppies come with high, medium or low energy levels. You have to decide for yourself, which suits your life style. Dogs with high energy levels need a great deal of exercise, and will get into mischief if this energy is not channeled into the right direction.

Finally, look at the overall structure of the puppy. You see what you get at 49 days age. If the pup has strong and straight front and back legs, with all four feet pointing in the same direction, it will grow up that way, provided you give it the proper diet and environment in which to grow. If you notice something out of the ordinary at this age, it will stay with puppy for the rest of its life. He will not grow out of it.

## HOW TO TEST

Here are the ground rules for performing the test:

- The testing is done in a location unfamiliar to the puppies. This does not mean they have to be taken away from home. A 10-foot square area is perfectly adequate, such as a room in the house where the puppies have not been.
- The puppies are tested one at a time.
- There are no other dogs or people, except the scorer and the tester, in the testing area.
- The puppies do not know the tester.
- The scorer is a disinterested third party and not the person interested in selling you a puppy.
- The scorer is unobtrusive and positions him or herself so he or she can observe the puppies' responses without having to move.
- The puppies are tested before they are fed.
- The puppies are tested when they are at their liveliest.
- Do not try to test a puppy that is not feeling well.
- Puppies should not be tested the day of or the day after being vaccinated.
- Only the first response counts!

*Top Dog Tips: During the test, watch the puppy's tail. It will make a difference in the scoring whether the tail is up or down.*

The tests are simple to perform and anyone with some common sense can do them. You can, however, elicit the help of someone who has tested puppies before and knows what they are doing.

## **WHAT DO THE SCORES MEAN?**

The scores are interpreted as follows:

### **Mostly 1's –**

Strong desire to be pack leader and is not shy about bucking for a promotion  
Has a predisposition to be aggressive to people and other dogs and will bite  
Should only be placed into a very experienced home where the dog will be trained and worked on a regular basis.

*Top Dog Tips: Stay away from the puppy with a lot of 1's or 2's. It has lots of leadership aspirations and may be difficult to manage. This puppy needs an experienced home. Not good with children.*

### **Mostly 2's –**

Also has leadership aspirations  
May be hard to manage and has the capacity to bite  
Has lots of self-confidence  
Should not be placed into an inexperienced home  
Too unruly to be good with children and elderly people, or other animals  
Needs strict schedule, loads of exercise and lots of training.  
Has the potential to be a great show dog with someone who understand dog behavior

### **Mostly 3's –**

Can be a high-energy dog and may need lots of exercise  
Good with people and other animals  
Can be a bit of a handful to live with  
Needs training, does very well at it and learns quickly  
Great dog for second time owner.

### **Mostly 4's –**

The kind of dog that makes the perfect pet  
Best choice for the first-time owner.  
Rarely will buck for a promotion in the family  
Easy to train, and rather quiet  
Good with elderly people, children, although may need protection from the children  
Choose this pup, take it to obedience classes, and you'll be the star, without having to do too much work!

*Tidbits: The puppy with mostly 3's and 4's can be quite a handful, but should be good with children and does with training. Energy needs to be dispersed with plenty of exercise.*

### **Mostly 5's –**

Fearful, shy and needs special handling.  
Will run away at the slightest stress in its life.  
Strange people, strange places, different floor or ground surfaces may upset it.  
Often afraid of loud noises and terrified of thunder storms. When you greet it upon your return, may submissively urinate. Needs a very special home where the environment doesn't change too much and where there are not children.  
Best for quiet, elderly couple.  
If cornered and cannot get away, has a tendency to bite.

*Top Dog Tips: Avoid the puppy with several 6's. It is so independent it doesn't need you or anyone. He is his own person and unlikely to bond to you.*

### **Mostly 6's –**

So independent that he doesn't need you or other people.

Doesn't care if he is trained or not – he is his own person. Unlikely to bond to you, since he doesn't need you.

A great guard dog for gas stations!

Do not take this puppy and think you can change him into a lovable bundle – you can't, so leave well enough alone.

### **INTERPRETING THE SCORES**

Few puppies will test with all 2's or all 3's – there will be a mixture of scores.

For that first time, wonderfully easy to train, potential star, look for a puppy that scores with mostly 4's and 3's. Don't worry about the score on Touch Sensitivity – you can compensate for that with the right training equipment.

*Tidbits: It's hard not to become emotional when picking a puppy - they are all so cute, soft and cuddly. Remind yourself that this dog is going to be with you for 8 to 16 years. Don't hesitate to step back a little to contemplate your decision. Sleep on it and review it in the light of day.*

Avoid the puppy with a score of 1 on the Restraint and Elevation tests. This puppy will be too much for the first-time owner.

It's a lot more fun to have a good dog, one that is easy to train, one you can live with and one you can be proud of, than one that is a constant struggle.