

Boxer Temperament

By Dan Buchwald

As a young child, I was very afraid of dogs. I was bitten by a German Shepherd when I was about 7 years old and that experience was quite traumatic for me, as one can imagine. Shortly after, my parents concluded that giving me a puppy would be the best way to deal with my fear. Boxers had the reputation of being very good family dogs and notoriously patient with children. That is how "Sultan", a pet quality Boxer but of the noblest soul and unmatched patience joined our family.



It didn't take long for Sultan to gain all our hearts and change my outlook on dogs in general. Bringing Sultan to our lives was for me, without a doubt, a life changing event that defined paths I had never dreamed I would follow.

However, had Sultan not have been the gentle soul he was, had he not been tolerant to the rough and often reckless expressions of my affection the story could have turned out quite different.

The fact of the matter was that not only my parents and family were very supportive but also Sultan had a wonderful temperament that lived up to exactly what Boxers were notorious to be: playful, patient and stoical with children.

According to the official AKC standard deviations of proper temperament, such as shyness should be severely penalized:

"Character and Temperament: These are of paramount importance in the Boxer. Instinctively a hearing guard dog, his bearing is alert, dignified, and self-assured. In the show ring his behavior should exhibit constrained animation. With family and friends, his temperament is fundamentally playful, yet patient and stoical with children. Deliberate and wary with strangers, he will exhibit curiosity, but, most importantly, fearless courage if threatened. However, he responds promptly to friendly overtures honestly rendered. His intelligence, loyal affection, and tractability to discipline make him a highly desirable companion. Any evidence of shyness, or lack of dignity or alertness, should be severely penalized."

It has been my observation of late that, far more often than one would expect, Boxers have been showing signs of bad temperaments, most commonly shyness. In the ring, shyness may express itself as fear to be touched by a judge even on a gentle, non-threatening approach, from crouching and shivering to such flighty extreme as to attempt to bite.

It is the judge's right and duty to excuse the extreme cases from the ring but even if the dog does not attempt to bite but shows serious signs of submissiveness and shyness the situation should not be overlooked, but often is.

A shy Boxer is not worthy of a blue ribbon. Condoning deviations related to the fundamentals of breed type is essentially, bad judging. It is contrary of the very reason showing and breeding should rely on, the betterment of breeding stock. Breed character is one of the pillars of breed type!

Granted it is not an easy task to separate the source of bad temperament, dogs with inadequate genetic makeup versus dogs raised poorly. Ultimately, it's not the judge's job to define the reason but it is the judge's obligation to highlight the temperament deviation and respond accordingly as per AKC rules and regulations.

The message a judge sends by excusing a severely shy dog from the ring is far reaching and has ripple effects throughout the fancy. Remember, behavioral problems are the largest single cause of canine abandonment, relinquishment to shelters, and premature euthanasia in the USA.

When faced with a very shy Boxer in the ring, I wish judges would ask themselves if they would trust having their kids/grandkids and their friends around that dog. Is there a stable, solid temperament there or an unbalanced animal which might go into flight at any moment? This simple, straightforward approach will tell you if the dog in question possesses the temperament that is required for the breed – if not, as per the AKC standard “should be severely penalized.” – which in my interpretation means at least withholding a blue ribbon since it's breed type we are talking about here.



According to Dr. Radcliffe Robins, BSc. DVM:

- Temperament is primarily a function of the dog's neurological makeup
- Temperament is 100% genetic; it is inherited, and fixed at the moment of the dog's fertilization/conception/birth.
- Temperament in the dog cannot be eliminated nor transformed from one type to another. It cannot change during the dog's lifetime. It is the permanent mental/neurological characteristic of the individual dog. But there may be an overlap of different temperaments in the same dog. For example sharpness may be seen with over aggression or submissiveness with being temperamental.
- Environment, Socialization or Training can modify the expression of an individual dog's temperament, but they cannot transform it nor eliminate it. The dog will die with the temperament with which it was born.

Biology teaches us that there are two main ingredients that contribute to making all of us what we are: genetics ("nature") and the environment ("nurture"). In dogs a large proportion of their personality is due to their inherited genes.

Temperament has been defined by some researchers as the inherited, early appearing tendencies that continue throughout life and serve as the foundation for personality.

Psychologists use the word "personality" to mean those characteristics an individual displays that allow us to predict how they will behave, react and feel in various situations.

As much as it is up to the judge to severely penalize extreme deviations of temperament, it is also up to breeders to stay alert at all times and constantly observe behaviors exhibited by individual dogs as well as trends in family of dogs, or bloodlines, in order to preserve proper temperament.

Ignoring temperament results in allowing bad temperaments to perpetuate. Breeding for looks should follow hand in hand with health and temperament. Overlooking any one of those may come with a very expensive price tag.

A dog with bad temperament is ultimately a miserable dog, an individual unfit to deal with normal changes of day to day life and a potential danger to others. Breeders, owners and judges must all remain alert to proper temperament in order to preserve the great traits Boxers are still known for and guide the this wonderful breed into a sound future.

Special gratitude goes to my dear friend Mandy Lockard for allowing me to use these pictures of her Boxers interacting with her beautiful children.

About the author:



Dan Buchwald is a graduate of the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Along with his mother Agnes Buchwald and family, he founded the internationally famed Hexastar Kennels in 1973. Over 150 Boxer champions have been finished under the Hexastar banner. Of those, more than twenty attained International FCI championships and six others American AKC championships. Dan obtained his Brazilian Kennel Club's all-breeds judge's license in 1988; the youngest ever at that time to attain those credentials. His assignments have taken him all over South America and into the United States. In '89 at the Kennel Review's Invitational Tournament of Champions; in '91, he judged at the New Jersey Boxer Club (dogs and intersex competition), So. New York Beagle Club at Westchester K.C., Trenton K.C. (Toy Group), Sussex Hills K.C. (Sporting Group), and the New Brunswick K.C. (Herding Group). He has also judged numerous sweepstakes, as well as the Futurity at the American Boxer Club twice.

Since moving to America over 20 years ago, Dan has pursued a successful career in professional handling and started selectively breeding Boxers while mentoring other co-owners under the Avalon kennel name. Even though retired from actively breeding, Dan takes huge pride of being the breeder of the first ever Boxer to go WB/BOW from the BBE class at the American Boxer Club National.

Dan is the author and illustrator of *The Boxer Blueprint*. He is an award-winning sculptor and is the illustrator for *The Brazilian Kennel Club Official Book of Standards* and *The Brazilian Kennel Club Conformation Book for Judges*. As a speaker, he has presented seminars to the Connecticut Dog Judges Association, Princeton Dog Judges Association, New Jersey Boxer Club, Sacramento Valley Boxer Club and in the UK to the Cotswold Boxer Club and Whales Boxer Club. He has been a repeated guest speaker at several judges and breeders seminars at the American Boxer Club Nationals and other parent clubs abroad. He is the author of many articles in the late *Boxer Review*, *Dog News* and *Showsight*, *Canine Chronicle* as well as several dog magazines abroad.