

SPECIALIST'S OPINION

Breed: West Highland White Terrier

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Why did you choose Westie? Is your decision based on its exterior, character, ability to work with the dog? What are the best things about this breed from your point of view?

West Highland White Terriers, Westies or Cesars are well known in Slovenia more than 20 years. Popularity of this breed was growing rapidly and were indeed very trendy breed. Number of pedigree puppies in Slovenia is getting lower every year though popularity is the same. A lot of people who already owned a Westie usually decide to get a new puppy of the same breed, after their dog dies.

The main reason for buying a puppy of this breed is its cute appearance which also reflects the temperament and stamina. They are very interested in training and they love to cooperate with their owners. Westies are very lively, full of energy but never nervous. Despite their hunting roots almost all of them live as a family dogs. They need consistent socialization and training. I think the best things about them are their graceful appearance, medium-small size, resistant hair, happy and independent character.

Character and its behavioral characteristics (positive and negative side):

- attitude towards children,

Westies love to play and cooperate with children. It is necessary that they get used to children running, fast moves, fast and loud speech. Otherwise Westies can quickly get idea that children are rank below them, and that they should be "tached", especially if they are too loud or their game too furious.

- attitude towards family members,

Westies are very pleasant companion to all family members. They are devoted to all family members, not just to the leader of the pack. If we play with them they are very lively, but if you rest, they are lying on the couch quietly and not annoyed trying to stimulate the attention.

- attitude towards other people,

Westies are curious, independent and confident. They sniff new people and let people to pet them. They are not reluctant or shy. Poorly socialized ones are difficult to tolerate new challenges.

- attitude towards other dogs and animals,

Typical Westies are tolerant to other dogs and animals. They accept family cats as their friends, but usually they are running after neighbour's ones. If males are raised too softly, they can be quite inconfident or dominant towards other dogs.

Handling and training – can we count them as »easy« or more demanding breed.

Westies are very steerable and trainable. Light for learning and training, even though considered by some to be stubborn, aggressive. The problem is with ignorant owners who cannot provide order and discipline. Organized training in the kennel club provides good environment to nicely train Westies and makes owners more responsible and bond to the dog. Unsocialized Westies can be sometimes exhausting to owners and the environment.

Is there anything special it needs to be careful about this breed?

No. The most important thing is good socialization of the puppy and consistent training. I recommend first trimming when puppy has 4-6 months, but absolutely before puberty. This is the way how dogs get used to grooming which is typical to the breed.

We all know that how we will train our dog while he is a puppy, that kind of a dog it will become. Therefore, it is very important to give as much attention to puppies while they are growing up just to be properly socialized. Cynological clubs are very helpful and useful with giving similar information.

For what kind of people this breed is suitable for and what kind of people shouldn't own it?

Westies are great dogs for active people, who are always in the move though it does not mean that less active people cannot own them or take good care of them. I can say they adapt very good as well with older people, because they are very calm in the apartment. A lot of Westies live happily with the families with children.

I would imply it is less appropriate for indecisive people who are not able to set the boundaries, because breed might be stubborn and it need to be trained.

What kind of needs they have: walks, nutrition?

They adore walking, exploring, running and playing. They are learning new tricks or jumping over obstacles with joy and happiness. They are tall enough to go with their owners in the mountains, running or jogging.

They like to eat and have no special requirements about nutrition. They eat homemade food, but also, they preserved it in delight.

For which dog sports can they be used?

If the owner is involved in any kind of sport activity with his dog, usually both of them very enjoy in doing it. Breed is suitable for most dog's sports. In agility, they are quite fast and good in obstacle jumping. Fly-ball is appropriate because they just adore balls. They can be used also as therapeutic dogs.

Hair and Grooming.

Westie's coat is wiry and it is not shedding. This type of coat is essential for hunting dogs as it offers good protection from the weather and during the hunting in the forest.

Some Westies have quite wiry hair already as puppies and the other have quite soft hair.

Proper quality of the hair is achieved by regular hand stripping - removing (pulling) almost dead hair from the coat. We strip the dog with a trimmer or with our fingers. Stripping prevents coat from getting dirty and makes it more airy. Therefore it needs less bathing, which dries out the skin.

Most of the Westies in Slovenia have hair cut with machine. Latter makes the hair softer and less willing to strip, coat also lose its typical structure, the harder overcoat and soft undercoat. Excessive bathing has a negative impact on the natural condition of the skin and I do not recommend it.

How long do they live?

Expected age is between 10 and 15 years, but in average they live around 13 years.

Which are the most common structure faults and genetic diseases?

Westies are very healthy breed. They do not have any special structure faults or genetic diseases. If they have any health issues, they are usually problems with dermatitis or allergies. Puppies are usually without any problems and in the adolescence, while growing up, inflammatory red spots on the skin (dermatitis) can occur due to increased level of hormones. When the dog reaches maturity, their occurrence usually stops. Allergies can occur in adult dogs, rarely in the puppies.