

the Dalmatian

The following article has been a collective effort from members of The Dalmatian Club of NSW Inc. The Dalmatian Club welcomes enquiries from anyone interested in Dalmatians or indeed, in becoming a member.

Origin, development and purpose

As far back as Egyptian and Mycenaean times there are spotted dogs depicted in artworks and tombs. Some of these were of hound type following chariots, while others were greyhound types. More recently there is a history of spotted hounds in France and spotted sporting dogs in Italy. It could be that all were ancestors of the Dalmatian as they gallop as the greyhounds do, will hunt by scent or sight, have a natural affinity with horses and are still used as Gundogs in Mediterranean countries. Their versatility does not end there. During World War II they were used as messenger dogs. If allowed, they also make natural watchdogs.

It is likely that the breed found its way into England with the migrating gypsies, where it became famous as a carriage dog, accompanying and guarding the carriages and horses on the road and in the stables. The dogs of this era were remarkable for their endurance capabilities. Structurally the breed has not basically changed since those times, the main development being refinement and the improvement of spotting. The pure white background and clearly defined spots became more noticeable around the turn of the century.



Hereditary peculiarities

Of particular interest is the fact that they are born pure white, unless born patched which is a fault. Spotting comes through at two weeks of age, with nose and eye-rims colouring up over the next few months. Dalmatians can also be born deaf. The Code of Ethics of The Dalmatian Club requires that deaf puppies be humanely put to sleep. However, a puppy born with hearing in one ear and deaf in the other (unilateral hearing) will lead a happy and normal life. The Dalmatian also has a unique urinary system. Whilst all other breeds convert uric acid to water soluble urea, in 1916 it was discovered the Dalmatians are closer to humans. They excrete uric acid. This can cause life threatening crystals to form. Fortunately, this condition is not common and if detected early can be corrected with diet. Fortunately, crippling diseases that require surgical correction do not plague the Dalmatian. Hip dysplasia is not unheard of but is not common and responsible breeders hip score their breeding stock.

In the Dalmatian, one of the important "hallmarks" is spotting - that peculiar mask of colour that no other breed of dog has. Another remarkable and almost unique characteristic is the Dalmatian's predisposition to present an ear-to-ear grin in welcome to family and friends or indeed to anybody they feel deserving.

About that grin

To those who have never seen a Dalmatian grin, it can indeed be perceived as menacing. The toothy grin, accompanied by snorts, a wagging tail and a relaxed body moving in time to wag, is indeed a privilege. The Dalmatian views 'the receiver' as a friend - someone to welcome - someone rather special. The grin is also an indication of the dog knowing it has done 'something' wrong - seeking exemption from



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reprimand. It just might work – sometimes. The toothy snarl on the other hand presents a stiffened body supported on tip-toes, a rigid tail and menacing eyes. This attitude does not encourage a friendly approach. The body tells the story – observe the dog and understand the language.

More than just 'a pretty face'

Dalmatians are loyal, loving and friendly. They are perceptive and intelligent with an amazing capacity for physical activity and endurance. All Dals require exercise which will keep them healthy and happy.

With their enthusiastic outlook and athletic construction, the Dalmatian is happy in the obedience, agility and jumping rings, as well as competing in tracking and endurance trials. Dalmatians can and do participate successfully in these activities, and have been seen enthusiastically enjoying lure coursing. There are Dalmatians with obedience and tracking championship titles, agility and jumping master's titles and endurance titles.

How wonderful it is to see a Dal watching with intelligence during obedience exercises, and how gracefully the Dal soars over jumps with ease, and how disappointing when it decides the whole activity is boring and not to be endured any longer. Unfortunately, our wonderful breed is not well represented in these activities. In the past it was not unusual to see Dals competing in trials and taking the prize. As a fun-loving, active breed they enjoy "doing things" and respond very well to positive, reward based training.



In the ring

Although the Dalmatian should be structurally sound and should have certain cosmetic features of considerable importance according to the Breed Standard, cosmetics should not be considered as of prime importance when determining a dog's placing in a line up. A Dalmatian's beautiful spotting should never take precedence over structure, gait and breed type but it is, still, an important factor to be included in one's final assessment.

Judges need to keep in mind that the Dalmatian is a "moderate" breed - a word that is used many times in the Breed Standard. Everything is there in black and white or liver and white for all to see! The Dalmatian is not designed to run fast or to hunt like a sight hound. Its forte should be endurance, and its construction should reflect this.

“Dalmatians are loyal,
loving and friendly.”

There is nothing more poetic in the canine world to the eye, than a good moving Dalmatian; that effortless gait with a long reach and drive that epitomises the correct movement for the breed. This is described in the Standard as "great freedom of movement". There is a certain carriage

of the tail gently flexing from side to side that completes the cadence of a good moving Dally. The Dalmatian brings elegance to the show ring exhibiting an athletic and pleasing outline.

Care of the Dalmatian

The Dal is an easy care "wash and wear" dog requiring an occasional bath (more regularly if showing your dog), attention to ears, teeth and toe nails and a daily vigorous brush. Dals shed hair every day and regular brushing will help to reduce hairs in clothes and around the house.

This gentle and sensitive breed needs to be close to its owners. They need to be considered part of the family. They also have a natural affinity with horses – the coach dog is indeed alive and well and living inside every Dalmatian.

The Dalmatian Club of NSW Inc. Welfare Service

In 1973 the club's Welfare Service (formerly known as Rescue Service) was formed after members expressed concern regarding the future of abandoned or unwanted Dalmatians. Over the ensuing years a number of dedicated members have given freely of their time and energy to rescuing, caring for and re-homing these Dalmatians.

Today's society no longer holds the maxim "a dog is for life" and consequently over the last few years the number of Dalmatians needing our help has increased dramatically. On average the club's welfare volunteers are fielding upwards of 80 requests for help each year.

There are, of course, both highs and lows when working with welfare, but the low moments fade into the background as you watch that previously unwanted Dally, tail wagging happily, as it drives off with its new family. An added bonus is the photos and letters received by the welfare carers telling of the mischief and joy the spotty dogs have brought to their new families.

The club is justly proud of its record in the rescue and re-homing of Dalmatians over the past 33 years, a service which the club believes holds the record for the longest, continually running rescue service in canine circles in Australia.

Potted history of the Dalmatian Club of NSW

Extracts follow from the Dalmatian Club's 1993 Handbook on the occasion of celebration of the club's first 50 years. Contributions are acknowledged from Ian Miller, John Gatfield, Olive Macdougall.

The 1930s

If the breeding and exhibiting of Dalmatians in NSW can be said to have a starting point, then it was surely in 1930 when the late Mr Edward Hirst imported a dog and a bitch from England as gifts for his wife. Dalmatians had not been seen in NSW since 1911 ... their last recorded appearance at a Sydney Royal.

The 1940s

The Dalmatian Club of Australia was formed on 26th January 1943. The first Championship show was held on 17th April 1943. An entry of 163 exhibits was judged by Mr W. Bruce. A feature of this show was the audible commentary of the judge on each dog placed after every class. This upset some exhibitors when a dog's faults were pointed out to the spectators. It was decided at the end of 1944 to discontinue the audible commentaries.

Up to 1992

Over the last 50 years there have been some outstanding Dalmatians. Some time back the committee identified the objects of the club. "We exist to increase the popularity of the Dalmatian in Australia, to encourage pedigree breeding, to urge universal adoption of the Standard and to foster increased showing of the breed. Membership is open to all who are interested in Dalmatians".

The Present

Members are working on improving the breed and taking responsibility for informing themselves of existing and possible problems. Breeder responsibility cannot be ignored or avoided. We hope to foster increased showing of the breed with the reinstatement of the club's Point Score for 2006 and look forward to seeing many of you around the rings during our nominated shows.



photo by Sue Town