

The Essence of Type

by Cindy Vogels

Essence - *“the intrinsic nature of something; the quality which determines something’s character” (Oxford University Press)*

The essence of breed type can be defined as how the various parts of a dog come together with the requisite temperament to make a breed unique.

Part 4 - Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier Temperament

My previous articles have addressed requisites of proper Wheaten type including: silhouette, head and coat. My next topic is proper Wheaten temperament.

Correct temperament is integral to breed type. I have heard many discussions offering various definitions of “temperament,” “personality,” and “character,” using different words to represent genetic and environmental factors. Behavior is certainly the result of genetic and environmental influences, but I believe that environment has only a minimum effect on temperament. In other words, external factors can hurt, but not “ruin” ideal temperament, and can help, but not “fix” poor temperament. Breeders are deluding themselves when thinking otherwise.

Our standard states, “The Wheaten is a happy, steady dog and shows himself gaily with an air of self-confidence. He is alert and exhibits interest in his surroundings; exhibits less aggressiveness than is sometimes encouraged in other terriers. *Major Fault* - Timid or overly aggressive dogs.

The most important characteristics of temperament are steadiness and bid ability. Historically, our breed was an all-purpose working, Irish farm dog and family companion. Multi-taskers, Wheatens had to be willing workers, whether guarding boundaries or performing a myriad of other farm jobs. In addition, they had to be faithful family pets. Wheatens are more sensitive than some other breeds, but they should always be sensible. Never stubborn, Wheatens should be amiable and willing to cooperate. Originally our dogs were more serious and humorless, but, through the widespread use of a few outgoing dogs, American Wheatens have evolved into a fun-loving breed. This happy, steady temperament ensures dogs that are anxious to please whether the requests are in the conformation, and performance rings, or under the kitchen table at home.

The standard points out that Wheatens are less aggressive than some other terriers. Historically, Wheatens were extremely game

and were reportedly bred into other terrier breeds to enhance their tenacity. But, badger trials are a thing of the past, and like other breeds, the primary occupation of every Soft Coated Wheaten today is that of family companion.

Because of the statement in the standard concerning aggressiveness, there is a commonly held misconception that Wheatens should not to be sparring in the conformation ring. On the contrary, when sparring terriers, Wheatens should be allowed their turn. The question isn’t whether or not to spar Wheatens, but rather how they should react when asked to spar. Each terrier breed will respond uniquely to sparring, and Wheatens should be expected to stand their ground without “flying.” While bitches are less likely to spar, two males should look at each other on tippy toes, tails up, ears up. Wheatens are slow to anger, and might choose to turn away, but should never back down to a challenge.

Dogs who behave uncharacteristically do not have the requisite temperament and they should not be shown. Needless to say, dogs with incorrect temperament should never be bred. Wheatens with correct temperament make wonderful companions, and breeders must be uncompromising when assessing the temperament of their breeding stock.❖



Photo is of Anthony Marzolino and his good friend, Ashley, courtesy of Anna.