

Temperament: The 12-Hour Clock



By Erich Renner

A DEFINITION OF TEMPERAMENT:

A component of character which refers to the dog's attitude towards people. If he has a poor temperament, he could be shy, vicious or distrustful. Temperament can also refer to a dog's steadiness and stability.

Temperament is the mental makeup of a dog. Shyness, on the other hand, is, in different degrees, generalized avoidance behavior. It can mean the dog is shy of certain things. In extreme cases, the dog is trying to escape from any novel situation. Sudden changes can trigger a rather violent and dangerous situation. Soundness is, according to the standard, a normal Rottweiler behavior.

To provide you with a simple method to judge a Rottweiler's behavior, I want you to imagine the face of a clock. The numerals are placed around in a circle from 1 to 12. Let's decide to make six o'clock the most ideal placing on the clock. If we assume at six would be the most desirable temperament according to the standard, at 12 we would find the most undesirable temperament. From 1 to 6 we would find every variation of neurotic and shy behavior, the most extreme shyness being found between 12 and 1. On the other side, from 7 to 12, you would find aggressive, over-aggressive and vicious dog. Not unlike politics, the extremes seem to meet. The extreme right and the extreme left have one thing in common, they are both BAD.

Starting at six and going towards five, we would find a dog not too obviously shy. The dog at five would react a little restless at loud noises. He would act uneasy among total strangers, but he would not show an avoidance behavior. He would never try to escape or panic at any sudden environmental change. Watching the dog's expression, he would show a slight degree of uneasiness, sometimes looking around. He would be a great companion and could be trained to be an excellent watchdog. With love and affection, the five would do almost anything to please.

The Rottweiler placed at four would show a marked sensitivity. He would show this characteristic - shock reaction when a gun is fire. Still, he would not try to escape. This four would tremble ever so slightly when he is examined by the veterinarian. He would back off somewhat when the judge 'goes over him'. He would back away from noisy cars, refuse to walk up some steep stairs, perhaps even back away from children. He is not, and not be, a dangerous dog. He is usually a great watchdog and barks immediately, based on his insecurity, not on his courage. He could be, under the right care, training and handling, a companion. If this dog is to be bred, it is important to select a breedingpartner of extreme soundness.

A dog placed at three is definitely and unquestionably ashy animal. He would show the typical avoidance behavior, hide behind the handler/owner, refuse to let a handler show his teeth, cringe when the judge touches him, and he definitely would be showing the most obvious sign, a tucked tail. This dog would be restless on leash and if you observe a three off leash, he would show the so-called flight or safety distance.

The dog placed at two would be classified as extremely shy. He would exhibit the "wild look" in his eyes. He would snap at a stranger when cornered. He would try to avoid close quarters. Always reserved, he is the kind of dog the vet dislikes to handle because he is somewhat unpredictable. Needless to say, this dog is pretty useless and should never be bred. Assuming that this dog had never experienced a trauma or illness, his behavior is definitely a genetic problem.

The dog placed at one is pretty neurotic. Unpredictable at all times, as a matter of fact, he would act and react like a wild coyote or wild wolf. Again, this animal should never be bred.

Now let us look at the other side of the clock. The Rottweiler at seven is a dream to someone who can cope with a certain amount of aggressiveness. He is as sound as the standard asks, with an additional amount of toughness. He would be an ideal Schutzhund dog. He would not allow a weak person to dominate him. He might get his neck hair up when he sees danger. He is a good family dog, if properly trained and controlled. If not, he can be somewhat of a problem. He would take on another dog if provoked. But with proper and expert handling, he is an ideal working dog. He is the ideal breeding partner for many of the rather 'soft' prospects. He is fearless without being overly aggressive. The dog placed at eight shows more alertness and behaves more aggressively. He is a dog I would advise the owner to take precautions with when going to a vet. He would be an ideal service dog. Although aggressive, he can be controlled. Only in expert hands can he or should he be a house dog and companion. This is a dog who is not sensitive to anything, he is gun sure and, if used for Schutzhund work, is a consistent high scorer.

The dog placed at nine is very aggressive. He should not be in the hands of an ordinary handler, but is best in service as a police or patrol dog. Around strangers, he could be a problem, but with proper training, he could be dynamite.

The dog placed as a ten is an extremely aggressive animal. He should not be owned or handled by novices. He definitely belongs in the service. The dog could, and has taken on, his own handler when he detects any

weakness. They are like loaded guns with the safety taken off. If this dog is bred, it should only be to partners who do not show the same temperament and not to dogs less than a five. You cannot correct shyness in a line by breeding to a ten. All you would end up with is roughly 1/4 tens, 1/4 the other partner, and the rest would likely be 'shy-sharp'. That is, they would fluctuate between the two extremes.

A dog at eleven is of little use because he is too aggressive. He goes off at the slightest disturbance. He might still be all right in the service, but for ordinary people in the breed, he is of no use. This dog should never be bred. He is neurotic on one side, and on the aggressive side, he could become a canine criminal. Of course, the whole matter is much more complex and there are shades and degrees of behavior which have not been mentioned.

The following defines and lays out the different elements in a working dog's temperament. It follows in part for, like the ADRK, the breeding of Rottweilers is and always will be the breeding of working dogs. I feel these points have to be brought up so that the generalowner and public can be educated to what these different terms mean. Many of us have a distorted view of characteristics such as calmness, aggression, fighting drive, sharpness, hardness and courage.

Sound temperament is essential in the Rottweiler and must never be overlooked or misunderstood.

Conformation, nobility, beauty and working, however important, are secondary to temperament.

Temperament is inherited and is therefore a direct result of a dog's breeding. Never is it a result of training, socialization or a stress-free environment (nor the lack of any of these). A dog with sound temperament will overcome negative environment factors and will stand out as a 'working dog' in spite of them. To be more specific as to the elements which make up the ideal temperament of the Rottweiler, let's look at them individually and define each one.

CALMNESS is determined by the dog's excitability, or sensitivity, threshold. If this threshold is high, a dog will react more slowly to a given stimulus or the stimulus would have to be greater to produce a reaction than would be the case if the dog's threshold is low. A dog with a low threshold is undesirable because he becomes excited by the slightest stimulation. This dog is a nuisance and is very hard to live with. Conversely, an extremely high threshold would produce a deadhead or a 'dull' dog, so we value most the dog with the medium high threshold. This animal will generally remain calm until the stimulus becomes great enough, be it work or play, then he will turn on strong.

SELF-CONFIDENCE is a trait of which a good Rottweiler cannot have too much. This is not to be confused with independence and in no way has a negative effect on the dog's loyalty toward his master. A dog who is sure and confident in himself, though he may appear aloof himself, will be loyal, loving and dependable. The self-confident dog does not need constant reassurance from his owner. This dog will have very steady nerves

and will not come apart in the face of danger or unpleasantness. The point brought out earlier about a dog of sound temperament having the ability to forget unpleasant experiences brings us to the question of the desirable degree of hardness or softness.

A soft-tempered dog accepts training more easily and offers little or no resistance to it. The reason is that he cannot stand the correction or punishment which he would receive for resisting. For this same reason, the soft dog, although he offers little resistance, will never perform the trained task with spirit and confidence. This is especially true in obedience but carried over into all training, whether formal or informal.

Hardness to extreme will also present training problems in the form of opposition, but can be overcome. The hard dog will eventually evolve into a high spirited, yet reliable, and well-trained animal. A dog of medium hardness coupled with the also desirable traits of loyalty and devotion will be the most trainable, yet confident of all animals. This is the working dog for which we strive.

SHARPNESS is desirable in the Rottweiler but only to a certain degree. This is the irritable behavior or quick excitability similar to hostility or anger which the dog displays in response to confrontation by a certain person or situation. A dog which is overly sharp would be of no value, as he would never be reliable in a social situation. Regardless of the intended use of the animal, two temperament traits which should be present in our Rottweilers are the fighting drive and the protection drive. Our dogs should have ceaseless desire to protect his family and his territory even in the face of death itself. This drive stems from deep loyalty and devotion to the master and should be stronger than self-preservation in a situation where the dog must make a choice.

When the protection drive is triggered, the fighting drive must also come into action. One is no good without the other; they must work in conjunction. A dog with strong drive to protect but no stomach for the fight, would be of little use. Likewise, a dog who liked to fight just for the sake of fighting would be a danger and a nuisance.

COURAGE is the attribute without which all the others are meaningless. It is a temperament trait of which a dog cannot have too much. It is essential for the working dog to be firm in the face of danger or extreme difficulty. He must have the mettle to meet vigorous opposition with fortitude and resilience even if subjected to physical pain and punishment. The willingness to endure pain is the true virtue which determines true courage. This virtue coupled with tenacity and unwillingness to acknowledge defeat clearly defines the truly courageous animal which we desire in the Rottweiler.

A fine, mature Rottweiler of good breeding, temperament, character and with proper training, becomes almost priceless to his owner. Sound temperament, coupled with proper training, makes them beautifully behaved and absolutely dependable under all circumstances. Dogs which should be characterized as vicious, over aggressive, over sharp, high strung, shy, soft, or cowardly, cannot be tolerated and must be eliminated from breeding programs. We should demand in the Rottweiler a very stable temperament, a hard, self-confident nature, and a level head if he is to remain a true working Rottweiler.