

NEWFOUNDLAND CLUB OF AMERICA

Breeder's Corner



Temperament: The Heart of the Newfoundland



Originally developed as a working companion for fishermen, the Newfoundland needed to be trustworthy in high-stakes situations, often working alongside children, families, and strangers. That need for reliability has shaped a breed known for its calm demeanor, steady disposition, and deep emotional intelligence.

A Newfoundland's temperament isn't just about being "nice." It's about being safe, stable, and predictable. These are not small dogs. A reactive or unstable Newfoundland—no matter how physically correct—is a liability. It is essential that breeders, owners, and judges alike uphold temperament as the non-negotiable foundation of the breed.

Our job as breeders is to breed only from dogs you'd trust to represent our breed's temperament in public.



Breeder Judges comment on Temperament

In the latest issue of *Newf Tide*, several breeder judges commented on the importance of temperament as part of our breed standard, and what they look for in the ring when judging.

Lynne Anderson, chair of the Breeder Education Committee and breeder at Three Ponds, pointed out that she observes the handler as well as the dog, looking at the

level of ease and comfort and interaction between the dog and handler. "Is the handler keeping close control or are they both relaxed and doing their job?"

Denise Castonguay, chair of our Judges Education Committee and breeder at CastaNewf, reiterated that temperament is the single most important characteristic in the breed and detailed how the NCA educates all upcoming Newfoundland judges in this fact. She said "The wagging tail, the sweet, soft expression that conveys his or her willingness to greet you says it all."

International judge and breeder of Fairweather Newfoundlands, Loredana Salina, outlined the steps she takes when assessing temperament in the ring, "First impression is their expression, it must be sweet and benevolent...then also is tail carriage, for me it is not acceptable if carried in between the legs."

At a recent seminar held at the Rose City Classic in Portland, International judge and long-time breeder of Cannon Bear, Einar Paulsen expanded on this assessment, commenting on movement, particularly noting dogs that are whale-eyed or moving with excess speed out of shyness rather than gaiting with power and sagacity should be penalized.

Betty McDonnell, of Kilyka, pictured above judging Best of Breed at the 2015 NCA National Specialty, said in her judging comments, "I was very pleased with all the entries temperaments. This is very important to me as the essence of the breed." "I was delighted with the steady, friendly Newfoundlands brought to me."

A Breeder's Role in Shaping Temperament

Many of the choices we make as breeders will impact the temperament of the dogs we produce. From our initial selection of breeding pairs, to the environment we provide for our dams and neonates, to the care we use in socializing and pairing pups with appropriate homes and the guidance we give those families as our pups mature, a breeder influences the temperament, personality and behavior of the dogs they produce.



[Download Temperament Evaluation Guidelines for Breeders](#)

Further Resources:

- “Levels of maternal care in dogs affect adult offspring temperament” — P. Foyer et al., *Scientific Reports* (2016)
- “Effects of maternal investment, temperament, and cognition on guide dog success” — E.E. Bray et al., *PNAS* (2017)
- “Maternal behaviour in domestic dogs” — K. Lezama-García et al., *Frontiers/PMC review* (2019)
- “Effects of dam fear and stress on metrics of puppy welfare” — A.C. Romaniuk et al. (2025, open access PMC)
- “Genetic characterization of dog personality traits” — J. Ilška et al., *PMC* (2017)
- Meta-analysis: “Heritability of behavioural traits in domestic dogs” — L. Hradecká et al. (2015)
- Classic/early work — “The Inheritance of Shyness in Dogs” (Thorne / historical analyses, archived PDF)

Whale Eye

Tucked Tail

Turning head away

Pinned Ears

Shifting Weight to Rear

Stiff Body

All of the Above

C-BARQ Evaluation as a Breeding Tool

Responsible breeders seek to produce puppies with reliable temperaments and few, if any, behavioral problems. Unfortunately, breeding decisions based on selecting sires and dams for sound temperaments do not always work out as expected.

Once puppies are sold, it can be difficult to obtain reliable follow-up information about their behavior as they mature. The C-BARQ makes this type of information readily accessible simply by asking puppy buyers to complete the questionnaire a year or two after purchasing a pup. Thus, the C-BARQ is a tool for developing and maintaining breed-specific behavior profiles over time.



A number of different breed clubs, including the NCA, thanks to a grant from the NCA Charitable Trust, have built substantial cohorts to provide baseline data. There are over one thousand Newfoundland responses in the breed specific cohort.

This means that breeders can evaluate the behavior of prospective sires and dams, as well as their offspring, monitor the progress of behavioral selection within breeds or lines over time, and obtain reliable phenotypic measures for future planning.

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Temperament vs. Genetics

Dr. Karen Overall, Senior Research scientist at the University of Pennsylvania joins host Laura Reeves to discuss how temperament in purebred dogs plays a vital part in how the dogs fit into their families and society, and how breeders can take that into consideration in their breeding programs.

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Breed Differences in Dog Behavior

Providing a comprehensive and approachable view of the science behind breed-specific behaviors, this book gives dog enthusiasts from all professional and personal backgrounds a better understanding of why dogs do what they do, and how we can improve our relationships with our canine companions. Covering genetics, phylogeny of canids, temperament, aggression, social behavior, and the history of dog breeding, it is an important read for researchers, students, veterinary practitioners and animal behaviourists, as well as shelter staff, dog trainers, or anyone looking for a greater understanding of dog breed differences.



Studies Needing Participants

Duke Canine Cognition Center [More Information](#)

John Hopkins Canine Minds Collaborative [More Information](#)

Harvard University Canine Brains Project [More Information](#)

Occidental College Canine Intelligence Lab - [More Information](#)

UCSD Pet Cognition and Communication Lab - [More Information](#)

Puppy Referral System

The NCA has a Puppy Referral System. This program allows any NCA member to list a planned litter, puppies available or an adult needing placement. Listings are now available to all NCA members. If you have questions or suggestions about the program, please [let us know](#).

[Start a New Listing](#)



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The Newfoundland Club of America aspires to be a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive community of enthusiasts recognized as the leading voice for the preservation, protection, promotion, and celebration of the Newfoundland Dog.



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