

Your Trailhound as a Pet

Trailhounds can make wonderful pets with a little time and patience and I hope to pass on a few helpful ideas to enable your trailhound to settle in with you as soon as possible.

In order to understand your Trailhound, it is important to know a little background of the hound and the racing life he or she has had. These hounds are the athletes of the dog world and have been bred for speed for many years. The sport of Hound Trailing in Cumbria has been going on for around 200 years and is still keenly followed by members of the Hound Trailing Association. The hounds follow a scent of aniseed mixed with paraffin for up to 10 miles and they run over fields and fells, jumping over stone walls and wire fences. At the end of the race, their owner is there, shouting and whistling the hound in, and waving a container which contains their favourite food.

This all has a bearing on your hound as a pet, and as they are totally motivated by food, you may find at first that your hound is very greedy and may try to pinch your biscuit or sandwich off your plate. It is best not to leave food lying around where your hound can reach. Once they realise that they are not in a racing situation any more and you are able to teach them some manners, they will relax and look forward to meal times with great enthusiasm.

When you first adopt your hound, do not forget that they have lived in a kennel for most of their life and will need to be housetrained. It is best to treat the hound as if you were training a puppy and start from scratch. Most learn very quickly but others may take a little longer depending on age and whether the hound has been allowed in the house, as some are.

Please remember also that your hound can clear a 5 foot fence with great ease and at first it is better to take him into the garden on a lead, until you feel sure that this is not a problem. If you carry treats in your pocket at all times, I am sure you will conquer this very quickly. Just bear in mind that some of these hounds have only been off the lead when they have been racing.

At first your hound may be a little nervous in the house, but this is only because they haven't been used to ordinary noises, such as the washing machine and vacuum cleaner, etc. This soon settles as they get used to a domestic situation and realize that warmth and comfort are a definite plus.

Hounds will eat almost anything and I find that a good quality dried food with perhaps a little added vegetables will be adequate. They have probably been fed a very high protein diet in their running life, sometimes being fed raw red meat but this is not necessary as a pet so a low protein dog food is best. Most of them love raw carrot and fruit, such as apple and banana as a treat. They are also great tea drinkers as many of them will have had tea to drink when they completed their race. My own retired hounds love a piece of wholemeal toast in the morning at breakfast time. I bake it in the oven so that it is similar to a rusk and they will chew this with great gusto.

When you first adopt your hound, you may think he is underweight. If it is between April and October, he will probably be at a running weight, and look thin to you. He may also have a clipped coat and be wearing a top doggie coat. Don't worry about this as he will soon put weight back on with correct feeding and his coat will soon grow again. If you adopt your hound during winter months this probably wont apply and he should be at a normal weight and have a full coat.

Trailhounds love their food! However, overfeeding is not good for them and puts a strain on their limbs and vital organs. An overweight hound may suffer from heart problems, arthritis and diabetes. It is easy to overfeed a hound but much more difficult to get the weight off.

If you feed lots of treats for training, then cut down their main meal accordingly. When feeding extra treats, try a carrot or a hollow rubber toy filled with nibbles which they have to spend time to retrieve.

Hounds really benefit from going to dog training classes for obedience, and several hounds that have been rehomed are doing exceptionally well and reaching a very high standard. They are very intelligent and love to learn and I think it is important for hounds to be socialised in this way and to have fun whilst training to be obedient.

Recall can be a little difficult at first, although some hounds will have no problem with this and return when called. Others may fly off into the distance and suffer from selective deafness, especially if they scent a rabbit. It is advisable when you first adopt your hound to use an extending lead or lunge line and call him back to you using treats and lots of praise when he comes straight back. You might find that it takes a little time but perseverance will win in the end, as soon as they learn a reward is on hand. Another way is to carry a whistle as they were often called in with a whistle during their racing career. Always be aware that your hound can easily cover a few miles within minutes and it is always better to be safe than sorry before taking off the lead.

Do not let your hound run free until you have established good recall onlead. (See our Training Recall leaflet). Continue training and always have treats in your pocket to reinforce good behaviour.

There are numerous advantages to having a Trailhound as a pet, and once you have established a few ground rules and perhaps taken him to dog training classes for both socialisation and learning, you will have a lovely loyal companion for many years to come.

If you would like to contact me to discuss your hound, I would love to hear from you. I have had Trailhounds for about 14 years, both as pets and in a racing situation, and I can often find out the racing past of your hound, if you are interested. I look forward to hearing from you and hope you have many years with your special companion.

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