

Every Day Has Its Dog
by Rasha Mourtada

And these days, the hottest pooches are exotic imports



Me Too Cooper is a class-A bitch. She loves to sprawl herself out on the manicured lawn of her Toronto home and watch as people stroll by. With a toss of her silky, jet-black hair, she gives off an attitude of relaxed superiority. But if you approach her, she bares her teeth and lets out a series of deep barks.

Me Too is a Bernese mountain dog, a breed that's known as a vigilant watchdog, but she's definitely more exotic than your typical Lab or golden retriever. For starters, her ancestors hail from the Swiss Alps - the canton of Berne, to be exact. A Bernese will cost you upwards of \$1,200. And with her glossy black coat, rust-colored markings and that familiar white cross on her chest, she will certainly stand out at the dog park.

These days, it's not easy to stand out. There are approximately four million dogs in Canada, and 28% of the population owns at least one. You want a pet that reflects your social status and refinement, but how do you find a pooch that will set you apart in a sea of mutts and mongrels? Here are some of the hottest picks out there, according to breeders, trainers and vets across the country. But finding the right breed is like finding the right car. Do you want a racy convertible, a family sedan or a rugged SUV?

The Canadian Kennel Club recognizes over 160 breeds. But if there's one thing people demand in a high-end pooch, says Deena Cooper, a Toronto-based trainer and Me Too's owner, it's a non-shedding coat. "People don't want dog fur messing up their beautiful furniture," says Cooper, who runs Deena's Dog Services, a doggie bed-and-breakfast that also offers training and walking. Of course, some owners have no problem with a layer of fur coating everything they own (Me Too happily leaves a trace

in every room she graces with her presence). But as word gets out that some breeds don't bother allergy sufferers and don't require a lint picker, these dogs are becoming hot commodities.

For a breed that you can cart around in your Prada bag, consider the Chinese crested dog, which stands about one foot tall and weighs no more than 12 pounds. Dog lover Glenna Fierheller says this canine is for "people who like the erotic and slightly different - not run-of-the-mill." With only a crest of hair on the head and back of the neck, a plume on the tail and "socks," or tufts of fur, on the feet, the hairless variety is almost entirely bare. (The other variety, the powder puff, is covered in soft fut.)

The crestie is "half dog, quarter cat and quarter monkey," says Sharon Francis, a breeder based near White Rock, BC. It's athletic but small, and can easily get its exercise indoors. In fact, the toy breed turns its nose up at damp weather, preferring the comforts of home to snow and rain. This dog, which comes in a variety of colors from pure white to chocolate brown to speckled beige, will cost you at least \$1,000. And be prepared to lather up this baby regularly. Because their skin is bare to the elements, cresties require constant moisturizing (Vaseline Intensive Care will do fine) and protection from the sun. As well, the crestie can be prone to unsightly acne, which won't go well with that Prada bag.

If you're a couch potato who just wants a companion to bark at the boob tube with you, the cotton de Tulear will be content to watch TV for hours. Named for its white, cotton-like fur, the cotton is a lapdog that's well-suited to apartment living and requires only short bouts of exercise. Unlike its popular cousin, the bichon fries, this dog does shed, but only minimally. Expect to pay \$1,800 for the privilege of owning a cotton, which boasts of royal lineage. The breed originated in Tulear, Madagascar, during the 17th century. It was adopted by the tribal monarchy and remains the official dog of Madagascar.

If these lapdogs are a little too prissy, take a look at the traditional terrier group. Canadian Tire heiress Martha Billes has owned and bred Lakeland terriers for more than 30 years, and she adores Mini and Flash, two golden-colored terriers that are her latest additions. Billes appreciates their compact size: Lakelands grow to 14.5 inches tall and weigh about 17 pounds. "They're high enough that their hair isn't dragging on the ground," she says, "and they're small enough that I can take them carryon in the airplane." But despite their diminutive stature, Mini and Flash are energetic live wires. "They're determined to get there ahead of you, no matter where there is," says Billes.

If you want a larger, more rambunctious breed that's getting a lot of attention these days, check out the Portuguese water dog. Jamie Starr, a Portie breeder based in Welland, Ont., says it's "the dog of the day." A couple of years ago, she sold a pup to skater Kurt Browning and his wife, ballerina Sonia Rodriguez. Since buying her Portie, Oscar, last year, Macy Mills, an MBA student, has noticed the breed becoming increasingly common. "It was a rarish dog, and then people discovered that it didn't shed," Mills observes. "A lot of people don't want a shedding dog, but they also don't want a poodle."

The Portie is a medium-sized, active dog that loved to swim. Historically, it was used by Portuguese fisherman to catch fish, retrieve gear and pass messages between boats. Standing at almost two feet tall and weighing anywhere from 42 to 60 pounds, this shaggy canine of white, black or brown fur comes with a price tag of about \$2,000. This dog is known for its intelligence and limitless stamina. Expect to devote lots of time and energy to a Portie. "Be prepared to have your very own furry shadow." Says Mills. "When I'm home, Oscar is always very close to me. I don't remember the last time I went to the bathroom myself."

Most dogs don't want to be left alone all day, but especially not Porties, so consider doggy day care or a walking service, which can cost between \$250 and \$600 a month. Training is a must for this breed (as it is with most others), so add another \$180 for six weeks of lessons or \$50 for a one-on-one session.

While the Porties may demand all your attention, the Afghan hounds demands the skills of a professional hairdresser. With long flowing hair - which requires constant grooming - the graceful and elegant Afghan can be said to resemble a woman. Although it doesn't shed, this breed requires more maintenance because of its long hair, says Phyllis Pancel, and Afghan breeder based in Sudbury, Ont. "Someone's got to comb that glorious coat, and that can be time-consuming," says Pancel.



Afghans are best suited to singles or couples willing to invest time in grooming them. A puppy will cost between \$650 and \$800, and will grow to more than a proud two feet tall. Pancel says Afghans are "very aloof but lovable," much like cats. This breed is a good match for a dog owner looking for a stately pet that will turn heads.

There are, of course, more than 150 other breeds to choose from. The soft-coated wheaten terrier is another non-shedding breed that seems to be catching on (price tag: \$1,200 and up). And you've probably noticed the sleek and grey Weimaraner (about \$1,000 and up), which William Wegman made famous by photographing in designer clothes. A toy dog that's been making more appearances is the cavalier King Charles spaniel (also starts at \$1,000), a tiny pup that's great with kids.

While you may be tempted to go for the trendiest pooch, owners and breeders alike caution that buying a pet is a personal choice. It's about making sure your needs are compatible with your dog's: look for a breed that's the right size, temperament and activity level to suit your lifestyle. "There are so many reasons for buying a dog," says Phyllis Wolfish, an international all-breed judge based in Toronto. "A companion for the children. Guardian for the house and the property. Social status. But," she warns, "if you don't really know why you want one and you but it just because it looks cute, you can make a monster out of an adorable puppy."

Before you buy a dog, do your homework. Get in touch with the Canadian Kennel Club or visit a dog show - but beware, don't pet the contestants before they that their spin in the show circle. Visit Purina.ca or ckc.ca, where you can complete surveys that will suggest suitable dogs for your needs. Or call a local vet for advice on how to choose the right breed and where to find a reputable breeder.

If you do your research, you're likely to end up with a loyal Companion that's perfect for you. Keep in mind that man's best friend requires loads of tender loving care. As you rub moisturizer on your crestie or wage war on your Afghan's tangled hair, you may find yourself wondering exactly who's leading the leash. But then, every status symbol comes with a price tag - just like that Prada bag.