



# ALASKAN MALAMUTE

## THE DOG IN WOLF'S CLOTHING?

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Provided by  
Texas Alaskan Malamute  
Rescue Association



Alaskan Malamutes are dogs in wolf's clothing. But while Malamutes are certainly not wolves, nor possess more wolf heritage than any other breed, this error in public perception is perpetuated by the Malamute's more primitive temperament, as dogs go, their almost wolfish good looks, or by the appearance of rangy and poorly bred dogs.

The Alaskan Malamute is actually an ancient dog and believed to be one of the oldest dogs in North America; these arctic dogs little resembled the beautifully groomed show dogs seen on TV today, but rather the rugged, hard working arctic sledge dogs of native Alaskans. The true origins of this large spitz-type dog are mostly lost to history, as the original Alaskan people had no written language. However, their name comes from an Inupiat tribe, the Malimiut, who populated Kotzebue Sound and northwest Alaska.

Of course, the arctic people didn't think of dog "breeds" at all. The original working sled dogs came from using whatever dog worked best for the job. Therefore, "breed" is actually rather misleading when speaking of the original Malamute dog. These early arctic dogs were quite similar, although different areas and lifestyles dictated slightly different dog types.

Climate was their major common factor. Harsh arctic conditions demanded independence, intelligence, and strong coping skills for survival. Nature designed Alaskan Malamutes as highly adaptable and physically enduring creatures. Their nomadic occupation created strong and hardy dogs, which also possess an assertive and often larger than life attitude. The result is a true work of nature's artistry.



Powerful jaws crush through frozen food, well-furred ears and a thick double coat protect and insulate, as does the throat's extra fold of skin, large well-arched feet grip snow and ice securely, and a fuel-efficient body needs little food to sustain its self. In fact, all the Malamute's physical characteristics are ultimately geared toward survival; from the moderate slope of the head that allowed cold wind to slip past, to that extraordinary bushy tail which functioned as the ultimate nose warmer as the Malamute curled up asleep in sub-zero temperatures.

The basic Malamute temperament also reflects that age-old adage -- "survival of the fittest." Dogs not big enough in size or attitude to hunt for food needed the smarts and speed to steal instead. Malamute social structure is pack oriented and highly conscious of social stature. And so with other dogs, they developed plenty of attitude and serious social infractions were often dealt with swiftly. They remain highly attentive to their surroundings and sensitive to body language. They howl to communicate, talk in grumbles, and will occasionally bark -- to the delight or chagrin of human listeners.

Just as Native Alaskans originally used Malamutes to pull heavily loaded sleds, hunt arctic mammals, and as general pack animals, the immigrants to Alaska used Malamutes in similar fashion during the Alaskan Goldrush. The Malamute resume also includes WWII, Byrd's Antarctic expeditions, and the US Service Expedition to Antarctica. When recreational and sport sledding became popular pastimes in the northern United States, it was primarily the dedication and determination of those sled dog fanciers which shaped Alaskan Malamutes into its now recognizable breed.





There are three main foundation lines of the Alaskan Malamute. Arthur Walden had developed his Kotzebue line, work that Milt and Eva Seeley continued when Walden went to Antarctica. It was the Seeley's famous Chinook Kennels which trained and supplied sled dogs to the Antarctic expeditions. Although not interested in AKC recognition, Paul Voelker developed his own line of slightly different Malamutes, the larger M'Loot. A third line, the Hinman strain, involved only a few dogs. Blending Hinman with the Kotzebue and M'Loot lines produced excellent dogs, which made great contributions to the breed. But let's get back to the main story, shall we?

AKC recognition came in 1935. However, the registration period was brief, allowing only enough dogs accepted to develop a small foundation stock. Many of these Malamutes sent to Antarctica did not return; they were destroyed, largely due to a tragic bureaucratic decision. This decision nearly destroyed the breed as well, as many of the best Malamutes died. The AKC then reopened breed registration using tighter restrictions, and quickly closed them again. It was within this short time frame that the M'Loot and Hinman lines combined with the remaining Kotzebue dogs and produced our modern Malamute.

Today's Alaskan Malamute retains his original instincts and abilities with very little modification by modern man. They are often used today for sport and recreational sledding, skijoring, and yes, still the occasional hunt. Malamutes in more temperate zones may act as working pack dogs, pull carts or skaters, or perhaps train as various service or therapy dogs.

Malamutes love to explore and can run great distances if not kept leashed. They dig huge craters, shed profusely, hunt small animals, and howl. They can destroy a crate and escape a kennel with ease. They are still very social and pack oriented dogs who can be dominant, or even aggressive, with other dogs. And most Alaskan Malamutes remain highly active predators in their own backyard or neighborhood.



To the inexperienced and unwary, the daily challenge of training and containing this breed can result in defeat. Malamutes are not suitable for every home or family, and unsuspecting new owners are often unprepared for the day their sweet and wonderful pup suddenly develops a mind of its own. Quite simply, what was initially a cute little ball of fluff may become a very large and rambunctious monster.

As Malamutes enter into adolescence, they begin to assert their dominance with other dogs and test their owners' authority. A command blatantly ignored, or delivered with a twist, is common. They concoct new and interesting ways to pillage, plunder, and steal the objects of their desire. The destructive power of a Malamute, or their single-minded focus, is often astounding to the uninitiated and unprepared. Owners need patience, and a sense of humor, to survive this stage.

Patience and adulthood brings a more reserved dog. However, reserved is a rather relative term with most Malamutes. Efforts previously proven ineffective may not be worth an adult Malamute's time, or

he may assume the role of the perpetual clown. However, they remain determined, manipulative, and goal oriented in either case. A cunning conniver often resides behind that smiling dog face!

Eventually, and usually during adolescence, the basic Alaskan Malamute warning label finally hits home. Far too often, these wonderful dogs are sold by pet stores or backyard breeders to homes which lack proper breed education. A mismatch between this breed and the family lifestyle often results in a failed relationship.



Alaskan Malamutes are frequent victims of this problem. Malamutes are lost, abandoned, neglected, or abused as a sad result. Still others become homeless from unforeseen owner circumstances such as divorce, death, or financial problems. In these situations, the breed rescue organizations step in to assist willing owners or save dogs. Most Alaskan Malamutes needing help today come from their owners or are strays found in shelters.

However, the Malamute's adaptive nature includes the ability to rebound from such bad fortune. Malamutes are full of vibrant personality and are often humorous or inventive. They are openly affectionate and enjoy human company, with many dogs highly sensitive to the owner's needs and feelings. They are excellent and frequent conversationalists, even argumentative at times. And although quite active, this breed can be a great couch potato and foot warmer.

Experienced Malamute owners feel their good qualities far outweigh the trials of companionship. Compromise and adapt are words most good owners know well. In fact, many owners actually enjoy the uncertainty of what these dogs will think up next. Some willingly admit their crafty Malamute is often one step ahead of them?

Their aficionados consider Alaskan Malamutes truly owned in only the loosest of terms, considering them a working or active family companion rather than a submissive pet. Actually, most feel it's rather like living with a big, hairy child.

The writings of Hudson Stuck, an archdeacon who traveled the Yukon extensively by dog sled, may best sum up the Alaskan Malamute and could easily be the Malamute owner's mantra:

"The Malamute is affectionate and faithful and likes to be made a pet of, but ... is independent and self-willed and apt to make a troublesome pet. However, pets that give little trouble, seldom give much pleasure." – *Ten Thousand Miles with a Dog Sled*, 1914.

Living with an Alaskan Malamute is never boring. I love these troublesome dogs and their wily ways. Although no two dogs are ever alike, perhaps you gained a better understanding, some helpful insight, and, hopefully, a deeper appreciation for Alaskan Malamutes.



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