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THE CREATURE FEATURE: Loving but loud, beagles require special owners

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**
Associated Press
update 6:33 p.m. ET, Wed., Feb. 13, 2008

When Uno the beagle got caught up in the excitement of his big win at Westminster Kennel Club, he reacted just as a beagle-lover would expect: with a joyful noise.

"That's their way of telling you they're happy," says Joan Kerr, who runs Penny Angel's Beagle Rescue in Ventnor, N.J. "They were originally bred as hunting dogs — if they see a rabbit or a bird or a squirrel, they'll bark."

Celebrating a rabbit, a bird, your homecoming from a day at work, or winning best in show, it's all one to a beagle. And for those that love them, their vocal antics are charming, says Christine Tartaro of Galloway, N.J., a volunteer with Kerr's rescue.

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At gatherings of beagles and owners, "sometimes something sets them off and all the people have to stop talking. We all think that's cute," she says.

Of course, not everyone agrees. So if you're feeling inspired to get a beagle after watching the delightful Uno become the first of his breed to win best in show at the nation's biggest canine competition, there are some things you need to know.

Beagles are already one of the most popular breeds in the country. Their compact size, easy grooming, and loving nature make them excellent companions for the right family.

But they are also talkative and stubborn. As Kerr puts it, "Beagles have a mind of their own. You have to be one step ahead of a beagle all the time."

Combine this with the focus on scents that comes from their past as hunters

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and you can have a problem. "They're going to follow their noses no matter what," says Tartaro - even if it means ignoring your commands. "There are some dogs that are eager to please. With beagles, sometimes it's 'Make me!'"

This makes them bad candidates for play at your local off-leash dog park unless it's very securely enclosed. And you need to be serious about your own fencing, as well. Escaping the yard again and again is one of the main reasons beagles are surrendered to Kerr's rescue.

"Even if you have a fenced yard - some will even dig under a fence and go," Tartaro warns.

All this means that sometimes owners find the dogs give them more than they bargained for: Kerr 's organization rescues more than 300 beagles a year just in her local area around southern New Jersey.

If you do want to adopt a beagle, Kerr encourages you to consider adopting an adult.

Many adult dogs in rescue are already housetrained, and even if not, Kerr says, an older dog is easier to train than an immature puppy.

You'll also get to skip the most destructive stage of chewing and getting into things - "I had a beagle puppy who took out the entire carpet in the living room," recalls Tartaro.

If you do want a puppy, Kerr's rescue actually places quite a few, so don't rule out the possibility of an adoption.

But if you want to purchase a dog instead, do your research carefully. One sign of a good breeder is that they'll ask you as many questions about the home you can provide as you should ask them about the dog; they will not just hand a puppy over in exchange for a check.

And the most important question to ask is what happens if you can no longer keep your dog. The best breeders will say that they will take the dog back at any time in its life. Of course this means that such a breeder will never sell through a pet store or puppy dealer, which makes it impossible for them to keep track of who owns the dog.

Either way be prepared for a long commitment, a beagle's lifespan is 10 to 15 years. You may not be completely in charge, but you may find you'll love every minute of it.

"If you look into their eyes, you'll melt," says Tartaro. "I end up doing anything they want me to do."

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Beagle rescue on the Web:

<http://pennyangelsbeaglerescue.com/>

<http://www.beagles-on-the-web.com/adopt/>

<http://sosbeagles.org/map/>

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