

# Chow Chow

An ancient and interesting breed derived from Asian heritage, the Chow Chows ancestry can be traced back to the 10th century B.C. when they were considered the "peculiar" dogs of the barbarians. In early Chinese writings, the breed was referred to as the Tartar dog, named after the Tartars who had invaded China bringing with them a large number of lion-like dogs with black tongues. Lucky for the Chow, they were smuggled out of China before the Cultural Revolution whereby dogs as pets were considered useless. The name Chow most likely is derived from the Chinese word Chaou, which translates into dog of great strength. Another theory is the name may have come from the word Tchou a word used to describe the most important of Chinese traders. The name Chow Chow, as we know it was believed to have originated in Pidgin English but since most records of that era have been destroyed, this fact remains unclear.

Characteristics in terms of body type and character have remained virtually untouched for the past 4,000 years. Morphologically, the Chow is the canine most closely related to the wolf along with sled dogs and spitz breeds. Standard conformation for the Chow requires the dog to be solid in color. Red, black, blue, fawn and cream are considered acceptable colors but deep red and black seem to be preferred. Red puppies are often born with a black mask, which disappears as the dog matures. The coat may be one of two varieties, rough or smooth. The original (rough) Chow coat was thick, straight and coarse with a great woolly undercoat. General weight is 45-70 pounds and the height is 19-20 inches. The dog's body should be compact and short coupled showing good balance and strength. Chows' have a magnificent head resting on a powerful arched neck. The broad skull and muzzle are always apparent, the dog's lips and tongue are clearly black. Skin on the head of the dog should not be wrinkled yet be loose enough for the dog to show some expression. The eyes are almond shaped and small, while the ears are small, erect, and thick, set well apart and tilted slightly forward. The tail is set high and forward, the tail resting on the dog's back, leaving an impression in the coat as is also the case with other breeds such as the Keeshond. The feet are small, tight, round and cat like. The Chows stifle joint (knee) is straight which gives the impression that the dog is moving from the hip with a stiff gait. A beautiful and powerful animal.

Resulting from centuries of fighting for their existence, the character of the Chow is unique. Aloof, quiet, and independent Chows are ready to defend their territory when necessary. Living on the outskirts of mankind helped to produce the dog's desire to bond to man yet also remain wary. Chow's of today are the same, loyal to family and suspicious of strangers. This breed epitomizes the term one- man dog. I have found Chows to be extremely clean about themselves and their environment never having a client call me with a housebreaking or chewing problem. Care must be given to quality control when one owns a Chow. Hunting instinct is still very much part of the breed to date, so a chance to hunt is always welcome by a free roaming Chow. If given ample opportunity to run off lead, a Chow might not want to come back to its handler too soon. Across the board, no matter how much puppy socialization one provides for a Chow puppy, chances are that as an adult the dog will only be just so tolerant of strangers. This

is important if you have children and expect that their friends are going to be coming around. It is critical to remember that they have a short fuse for strangers who might pressure them; therefore keeping them on lead is imperative while in public. I know Chows that will leave you alone as long as you leave them alone. I can live with that. I also know Chows that will not tolerate the presence of strangers on their turf. I can live with that too, can you?

This is not a breed for just anyone. Chows, although loving to family can be equally dangerous to strangers (problems generally arise when owners are in denial of their breeds inherent temperaments.) When the adorable fuzzy little bear of a pup grows up and becomes what we have bred for centuries, he should never be faulted for behaving as he is instinctively urged. We can ruin the life of any dog when we are not prepared to understand from where he comes and why he behaves as he does. Chows are royal and loyal dogs and should be treated respectfully as such with their exposure to visitors carefully monitored. Chows are said to have incredible courage and would give their own lives for that of their master. This is an amazing breed for those who lead quiet, sedentary lives. Imagine how great it is having a dog who is clean, quiet and independent and who will protect you from harm. People with hectic life styles and home lives should steer clear of owning a Chow, as high activity would be too much stress on this solitary breed to cope with comfortably. They tend to enjoy peace and quiet.

I have successfully trained many Chows. They are clever dogs and when appropriately motivated perform well in obedience. The trick to training a Chow is in the relationship formed between the dog and it's person. Positive reinforcement tends to be most effective. Owners that try forcing their Chow to perform, quickly come to realize force creates conflict resulting in poor training. Dominance by the owner is usually achieved through teaching deferential obedience exercises. Training is best received when one begins with a pup. Ultimately, teaching your Chow with patience and consistency are the keys to success.

If you own a Chow or are owned by a Chow, congratulations, I'm sure that your experience together is notable. If you are considering becoming a Chow owner, speak to owners of Chows first so you can get an understanding of the breed and help insure that perfect match.

Best of luck,  
***Steve Diller***