

Labs still lead but French bulldogs leap in popularity in US

28 March 2018, by Jennifer Peltz



In this Feb. 16, 2015 file photo, a French bulldog competes at the Westminster Kennel Club show in New York. The French bulldog has bolted from 76th to fourth in just 20 years. It previously peaked at sixth in the 1910s and again in 2015-2016. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)

Americans still love Labrador retrievers, but the nation's flirtation with French bulldogs has reached new heights.

Labs remain the country's most popular purebred dog for a 27th year, while German shepherds and golden retrievers have hung onto the second and third spots in new American Kennel Club rankings being released Wednesday.

But Frenchies hit a highest-ever No. 4, and German shorthaired pointers cracked the top 10 for the first time.

THE REST OF THE TOP 10

The bulldog is fifth, after notching a record No. 4 ranking last year. Sixth through 10th are the beagle, the poodle, the Rottweiler, the Yorkshire terrier and the German shorthaired pointer.

Initially bred for hunting, the handsome, athletic "GSP" is increasingly visible as a bomb-sniffing dog and in agility and other canine sports. A GSP also won the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club dog show in 2016.

"They're a dog that will do anything you want, except lay around," says Jeffrey Drogin, a longtime owner in New York.

The versatile, sociable Lab has had the longest-ever reign as top dog. It broke the record in 2013.

But you can't beat the beagle for consistency. It's the only breed to make the top 10 for every decade since the AKC's 1884 founding.



In this Jan. 31, 2014 file photo, from left, a bulldog, a golden retriever, a French bulldog, a German shepherd and a Labrador retriever are shown off during a news conference at the American Kennel Club in New York. These puppies represent the five most popular breeds in AKC rankings released in 2018, with the Labrador retriever at No. 1 for the 27th consecutive year. (AP

Photo/Bebeto Matthews, File)

THE FRENCHIE SURGE

The French bulldog has bolted from 76th to fourth in just 20 years. It previously peaked at sixth in the 1910s and again in 2015-2016.

Frenchie aficionados appreciate the interest but worry that it's drawing unscrupulous breeders and under-informed owners.

"It scares me that because it's popular, everybody wants it. But not every family is right for a French bulldog," says Kerry Boyd, a Natick, Massachusetts-based dog handler who breeds Frenchies.

The downsized bulldogs with the pointed ears and funny expressions have become favorites of city dwellers who value compact, relatively quiet [dogs](#). They've enjoyed exposure from movies, ads and celebrity owners. The late Carrie Fisher's Frenchie even inspired an alien creature in last year's "Star Wars: The Last Jedi."

Then the breed made headlines this month when a Frenchie puppy died after a flight attendant forced it into an overhead bin.



In this Jan. 30, 2013, file photo, a bulldog named Munch, left, and a puppy named Dominique attend a news

conference at the American Kennel Club in New York. American Kennel Club rankings being released Wednesday, March 28, 2018 show Labs remain the country's most popular purebred dog for a 27th year, while German shepherds and golden retrievers have hung onto the second and third spots. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)

The death stirred discussion of breathing problems in French bulldogs and other short-snout breeds (though no pets belong in overhead compartments). Flat-faced dogs can be prone to overheating and sometimes need nasal or palate surgery. Frenchies and bulldogs also can be susceptible to certain spinal and eye problems. They are often born by cesarean section because of their big heads.

Given all that, New York's then-newsweekly The Village Voice devoted a 2015 cover to French bulldogs and urged: "Don't Buy This Dog."

Newton, Massachusetts-based veterinarian Dr. John de Jong sees Frenchies' problems firsthand, but he notes that other breeds are prone to conditions of their own.

"I would say to anybody purchasing a breed of any kind: Do their homework," says de Jong, president-elect of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

OTHER MOVERS

The Siberian husky and Australian shepherd have jumped into the top 20 in the last decade. The Chihuahua, pug and Maltese have tumbled out.



In this Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2018, photo, Memo, a Labrador retriever, competes in the sporting group during the 142nd Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, at Madison Square Garden in New York. American Kennel Club rankings released in 2018 show Labs remain the country's most popular purebred dog for a 27th year. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

- In this Nov. 2, 2005 file photo, a litter of seven golden retriever puppies trots across the lawn after their mother Carley at Mountain View Kennels in Williamsburg, Pa., American Kennel Club rankings being released Wednesday, March 28, 2018 show Labs remain the country's most popular purebred dog for a 27th year. But Frenchies hit a highest-ever No. 4, and German shorthaired pointers cracked the top 10 for the first time. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

THE RAREST BREED

It's the Norwegian lundehund, a six-toed, unusually flexible dog that historically hunted cliff-dwelling puffins.

Overall, the AVMA estimates there are about 70 million pet dogs nationwide (and over 74 million pet cats.)

DOODLES, MIXES AND THE BIG PICTURE

The rankings reflect puppies and other dogs newly registered in 2017. The AKC, the nation's oldest purebred dog registry, doesn't release raw numbers of dogs.

The club doesn't chart such popular hybrids as Labradoodles and puggles, nor other mixed-breed dogs. However, they can register as AKC "canine partners" for dog sports.



German shorthaired pointers wait to enter the ring during the 142nd Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York, Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2018. American Kennel Club rankings show Labs remain the country's most popular

purebred dog for a 27th year. The bulldog ranks fifth. Sixth through 10th are the beagle, the poodle, the Rottweiler, the Yorkshire terrier and the German shorthaired pointer, which cracked the top 10 for the first time. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

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THE DEBATE

Whatever the rankings, animal-rights activists say purebred fads drive puppy mills, consign other dogs to shelters and prioritize looks over health.

"The aesthetic standards of the AKC can leave dogs crippled and in near-constant pain," People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals wrote to the club this month.

Breeders such as Boyd say they spend thousands of dollars on testing to propagate healthy dogs. The AKC argues that breeding preserves specific traits that can help police pick K-9s or households choose suitable pets.

Whether purebred or mixed breed, "the most important thing is that you love the dog that's yours and that you responsibly own it and care for it," says AKC spokeswoman Gina DiNardo.



A German Shepard named Commander attends a news conference at the American Kennel Club in New York, Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2013. American Kennel Club rankings being released Wednesday, March 28, 2018 show Labs remain the country's most popular purebred dog for a 27th year, while German shepherds and golden

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