

# Coonhounds – We Love These All-American Characters!

By Emily Plishner

**Bonding:** Coonhounds are bred to work in partnership with their human—they are the nose, you are the brain. They are very eager to please, and sensitive to their owner's desires, but you have to earn their respect. They will test you, especially in their teenage years (roughly six months to three years). You need to be firm and consistent with them or they will rule you.

**Ears:** Those long ears are magnificent. They can keep your feet warm. They are incredibly expressive. Coonhounds love to have their ears fondled, scratched and played with. Those ears can get nasty infections, though, so you have to keep them clean.

**Passion:** Coonhounds do everything they do with gusto—whether following their noses, participating in organized dog activities, or just chowing down. Their zest for life is infectious, although it can sometimes lead to trouble. They will jump up and slime an elderly person's face with enthusiastic kisses. They are generally good with other dogs, but their effusive baying may prove off-putting to breeds that don't speak "hound."

**Independence:** Go on an off-leash walk in the woods with a coonhound, and you probably won't see much of the dog, although you may hear it and it will fly past every so often. It will explore rather than keep close. The rule of thumb is, "nose open, ears closed." If a hound is on a scent, it may not respond to commands it is perfect on at other times.

Coonhounds love to please, but if their human isn't right there to solve a problem for them, they'll get their own ideas. A lot of them can figure out how to get loose, how to open a refrigerator, and how to manipulate you into being late for work to play with them. They'll bust through screened windows and redistribute your dirty laundry.

**Voice:** Coonhounds have the most beautiful voices—if you like hound music. Many are as loud as opera singers, though, and not everyone likes opera. In suburban areas, there's always an opera hater within hearing distance. You need to be prepared to deal with complaints. Check local dog ordinances before adopting. You won't be able to leave your hound in your fenced yard while you work a ten-hour day elsewhere.

**Noses:** Coonhounds are bred to follow their noses. They can be "broken" from hunting, but in a crisis, it comes back. One lady who thought she'd broken her highly trained Search and Rescue hounds from coon hunting found out otherwise when a raccoon got in her house. A coonhound instinctively runs its game up a tree—or the furniture and curtains—and stands upright against the trunk barking continuously as loud as it can until you get there. It doesn't care if you are on the phone with a potential employer. Those raccoon "broke" coonhounds destroyed the lady's living room.

**Physicality:** Those short coats reveal musculature like a racehorse, but they will laze on the couch with you if you allow it. Or you can lie on the floor and snuggle up to them. Nothing puts me to sleep faster than pressing my spine against the spine of my hound.

**Uncouth behavior:** Coonhounds will do what you ask, but may not do it in a way that you anticipate. For instance, my hounds and I were visiting my elderly mother, who had put a spread of cocktail snacks on the coffee table. My boys were mobbing her as she sipped, so she asked me to call them off. "Come," I said. They both leapt away from my mother, over the coffee table with the snacks on it, and into my lap on the couch. They did exactly what I asked them to! Unless properly trained, they will also climb on tables and counters, and some even climb trees.

**Athleticism:** A coonhound body in motion is a joy to watch. But, it takes a long time to wear out and slow down. Tiring their brains helps. You need to be willing to spend a lot of time engaging with your hound. Nothing fancy—wrestling with your kids, running, biking, exploring the woods, scent games in the yard, trips to the dog park—will do fine. Hounds are ingenious at escaping fenced enclosures by jumping, digging, climbing or breaking. They can outrun most other animals.

**Shedding and drooling:** Coonhounds hairs are short, but they are plentiful and stick to everything. Your drier lint will match your hound. Some coonhounds drool when they get excited. They can look like they have shaving cream on their faces.

