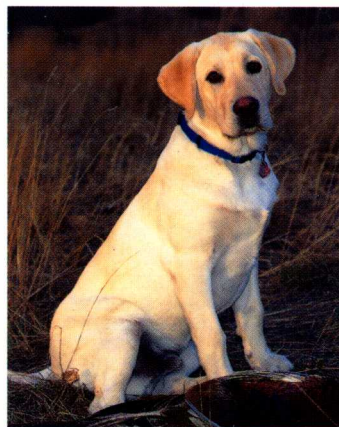




The Labrador Retriever Handbook

Audrey Pavia

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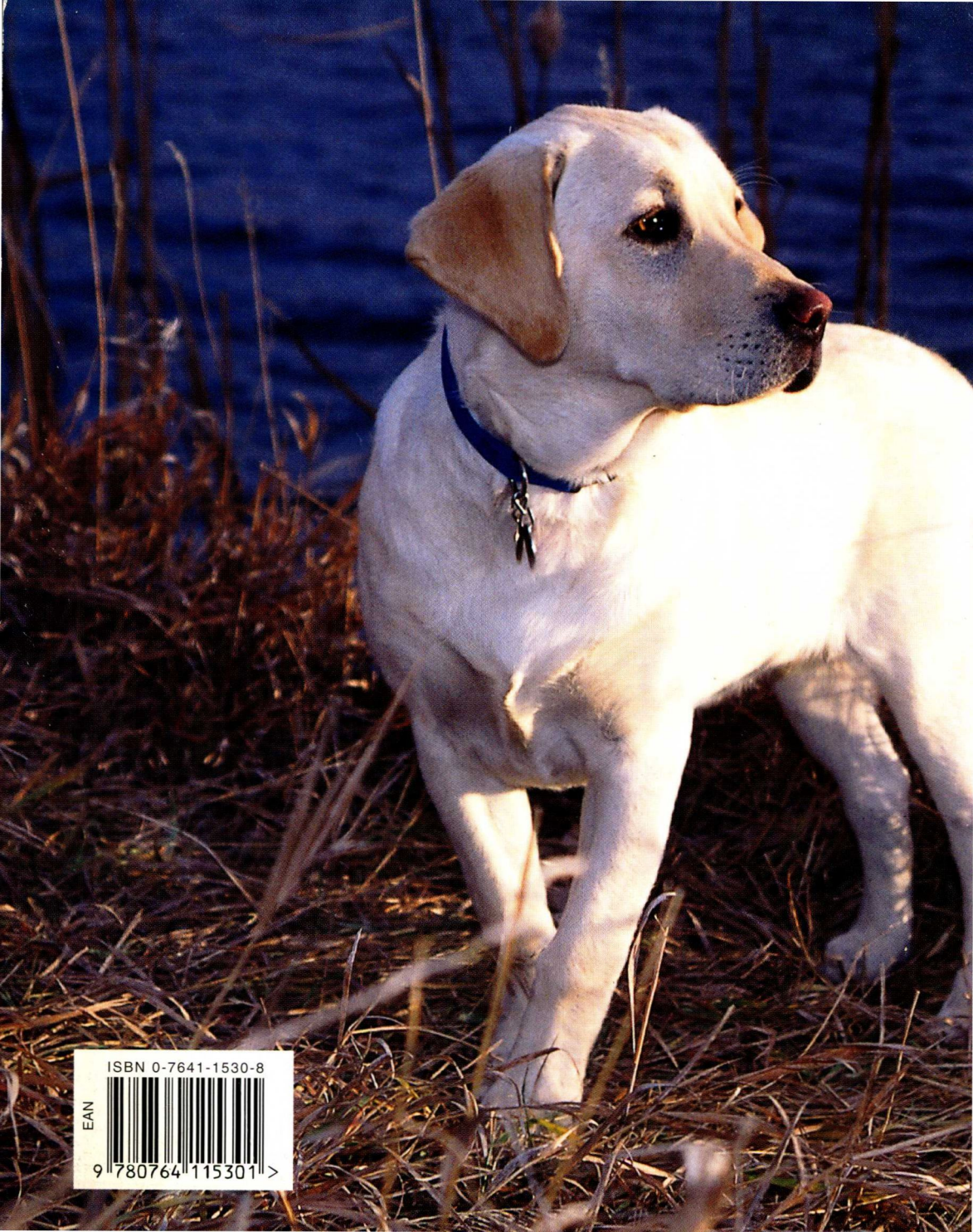
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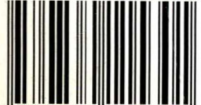


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Audrey Pavia is an award-winning freelance writer specializing in animal subjects. She has authored 11 books, including Barron's *Careers With Dogs*. In her 16-year publishing career, she has written hundreds of magazine articles for *Dog Fancy*, *Popular Dogs*, *Dogs USA*, *Puppies USA*, *The Puppy Guide* and a number of other animal publications. Former senior editor of the *American Kennel Club Gazette* and former managing editor of *Dog Fancy*, Audrey holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and is a member of the Dog Writers Association of America.

A Word About Pronouns

Many Lab lovers (including this one), feel that the neuter pronoun "it" is not appropriate when applied to our four-legged friends. However, for purely editorial purposes, to avoid the clumsiness of "he or she" throughout the book, we have decided to use a gender-neutral "it" when speaking in general terms. This should not in any way be interpreted to diminish the importance of Labradors, and for that matter, all pets, in our lives.

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Preface

In my years as an editor, writer and dog lover, I have never seen a breed of dog more deserving of its popularity than the Labrador Retriever. Friendly, gentle and fun-loving, the Lab comes as close to being the perfect dog as any canine possibly can.

I've known many Labs throughout the years, and each one has been a very special dog in its own right as well a great ambassador for its breed. Take Lydia, for example, a young black female who belongs to some friends of mine in Austin, Texas. Lydia is the ultimate family dog. She is best buddy to the family's 10-year-old daughter and babysitter to their 2-year-old son. Gentle and quiet with both children, it's hard to believe she's the same dog when it's time for a raucous game of fetch with the kids' athletic father.

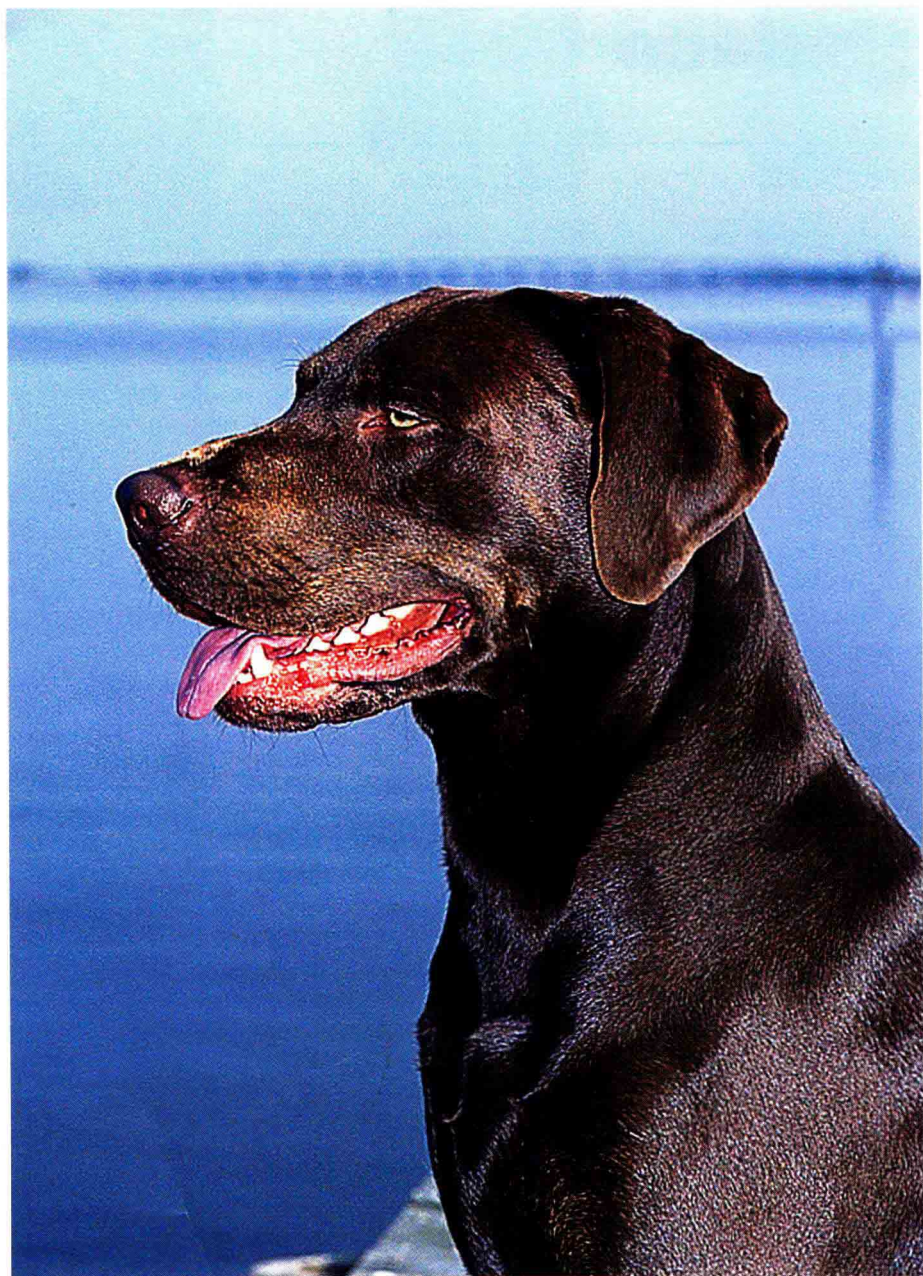
And then there's Hanna and Baxter, two black Labs who live with a couple I know. Hanna is a dignified old matron, enjoying her twilight years taking care of the couples' newborn infant. Baxter is young and full of energy, and also watchful of

the new babe. He's so watchful, in fact, there's no need for baby monitors in this household. When the infant begins to cry, Baxter is at Mom's feet, pleading with her to tend to Baby's needs.

Of course Labs are more than just nursemaids to little children. They are rugged and athletic dogs who live to play, hike and swim. In fact, one chocolate Lab I knew named Cocoa drove her owner crazy whenever the two would go on a camping trip. Cocoa would find the closest body of water to camp and spend dawn till dusk demanding her master toss a stick into the water just so she could retrieve it, over and over again.

The Labrador Retriever is a very special breed, and is everything we love most about dogs all rolled into one superb package. If you are the kind of person who appreciates an active dog that's easy to train and loyal to a fault, this just may be the breed for you.

Audrey Pavia
Santa Ana, California



The Lab's kind temperament is the breed's most popular trait.

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Chapter One

All About Labs

In their award-winning book *Labrador Tales: A Celebration of America's Favorite Dog*, authors John Arrington and Walt Zeintek beautifully describe the essence of the Labrador Retriever:

"Labs are Jeeps. And pickup trucks and sport utilities. Labs are never Lincoln Town Cars or Cadillac Eldorados. A Lab might be a Volvo Wagon, but never a Corvette. . .

"Labs are cabins in the woods, overlooking crystal blue lakes. Labs are cottages on the beach with waves crashing in the front yard. Labs are a walk through a state forest, public park or nature trail. Labs are seldom weekends in the city, five star hotels or casinos."

If you are reading this book, something inside you is drawn to the essence of the Labrador Retriever so accurately described by Arrington and Zeintek. Maybe you are captivated by the idea of adding one of these amazing dogs to your family. Or perhaps you already have a Lab in your life and are looking to soak up as much information as you can about the breed. Whatever the reason for your fascination, keep in mind that

the Labrador Retriever is no ordinary dog. Of course, if you live with one, you already know that.

If you selected this book because you are looking for a very special dog—a companion to you and a friend to your children—look no further than the Lab. This incredible breed, born of a working heritage, is the most popular dog breed in America. And it's no wonder. Labs personify what we love most about dogs: they are loyal and gentle, playful and hard working. When it comes to dog breeds, they are the cream of the crop.

A Brief History

The history of the Labrador Retriever starts around 15,000 years ago, when dogs first became domesticated. Anthropologists believe that wolves and humans came together over a common interest: food. The most likely scenario is that wolves began hanging around human camps in search of leftover scraps. Humans, intrigued by the boldness of this canine scavenger, began willingly

offering food to wolves. In time, a relationship developed between the two very social species. One or two orphaned wolf pups were probably adopted by a group of humans, and it is thought that this closeness led to the pups becoming extraordinarily tame. Since these wolves grew up treating their human counterparts as members of the same family, the domesticated canine was born.

Throughout human history, dogs helped people survive in a harsh world. Providing more than just companionship, early domesticated dogs aided humans by herding and protecting livestock; hunting; and even serving as beasts of burden by hauling the belongings of their nomadic masters for thousands of miles.

From this place in time, we find the origins of the ancestors of today's Labrador Retriever. We don't know exactly how and when each stage happened, but at some point, the generic dog became the pure-bred Lab.

While we will never know exactly how it occurred, experts in canine history have proposed a number of theories. One notion is that it started in the late 1500s when European fishermen settled in what is now the Canadian island province of Newfoundland. It is believed the fishermen brought the ancestors of the Labrador Retriever along with them. The dogs were good hunters brought along to help capture game. They were also small enough to fit in the fishermen's dories, and they must

have been good swimmers to survive the watery working environment surrounding Newfoundland.

Another theory is that the Labrador Retriever descended from the dogs of Basque shepherds who immigrated to Canada from Portugal. This theory makes sheep-herding dogs the ancestors of today's Lab.

Whatever the early origins of the Labrador Retriever, experts agree that the breed's official beginnings hail from the 1830s when the 2nd Earl of Malmesbury began importing dogs from Newfoundland to England. The Earl recognized the Canadian dogs' considerable stamina, skill in the water and devout loyalty as traits that would be valuable to the landed gentry, those who treasured hunting as their favorite sport. According to the story, the Earl first saw the breed in a harbor in Dorset, England, and became intrigued as he watched them playing in the ocean and retrieving the fish tossed away by fishermen. The Earl started importing the breed from Canada, and he and others who brought the dogs to England bred them both to each other and to other types of hunting dogs.

The Earl of Malmesbury is also credited with naming the Labrador Retriever breed. Before the Earl dubbed them Labs, they were called a number of names, including St. John's Newfoundland, Lesser Newfoundland and St. John's dog. The word *labrador* means *worker* in both Spanish and Portuguese, and so Labrador Retriever seemed an

appropriate name for this hard-working dog.

It wasn't until 1903 that the Kennel Club, England's premiere purebred dog registry, officially recognized the Labrador Retriever as a breed in the U.K. A few years later, American sports enthusiasts began importing British-bred Labrador Retrievers into the United States. The Countess Lorna Howe and the Honorable Franklin B. Lord are credited with introducing the Lab in the United States, having brought the breed to America to work as a retriever. Before long, the breed's popularity as a hunting dog soared. In 1917, the American Kennel Club (AKC) officially recognized the Labrador Retriever breed and began accepting Lab registrations.

In 1931, the Labrador Retriever Club, Inc. was formed to promote and preserve the Labrador Retriever in America. One of the club's primary goals was to organize field trials where Labs would be judged on their ability to retrieve waterfowl. The Labrador Retriever Club was recognized by the American Kennel Club as the parent club for the Labrador Retriever, and it still holds that position today. The club is responsible for maintaining the AKC Labrador Retriever standard which serves as a blueprint for the breed.

Today, the Labrador Retriever is the most popular dog breed in America, a claim it has held since 1991. Still used as a hunting dog by sportsmen, the breed is also cherished for its



For many dog lovers, the Labrador Retriever is the ultimate canine companion.

companionship. Over the years, America discovered one simple fact about the Labrador Retriever: this dog makes a wonderful pet.

Lab Truths

- Newfoundland, not Labrador, was the original home of the Labrador Retriever.
- Unlike in the U.S., Labs in England must earn a working certificate before they can become conformation champions.
- Most guide dogs and search-and-rescue dogs are Labrador Retrievers.

Who Is The Lab?

Probably the single most incredible thing about Labrador Retrievers is their ability to be so many different dogs all rolled into one. The Labrador Retriever is a working dog, bred to aid humans in retrieving game in the field. Labs can hunt alongside their masters for hours on end, day after

day, using their keen senses and significant strength to get the job done. This same dog is also one of most dedicated companions in the canine world, a gentle dog who is trustworthy around children and intensely devoted to its master. Labs can be trained to aid the handicapped and taught to find disaster victims in a pile of rubble. Labs can seek out drugs stashed in suitcases and find bombs hidden in buildings. They can hike for hours, camp in rugged terrain and veg out on the couch, all in the same weekend. In essence, the Labrador Retriever is the consummate dog.

Lab Disposition

Ask Labrador Retriever owners what they love most about their dogs, and most of them will say “that Lab personality.” The Lab’s temperament is easily the breed’s most popular trait, and it’s not hard to see why. Labrador Retrievers are easy to train, love to have fun, and adore their humans above all else.

It’s no accident that virtually all Labs manage to be born with these amazing personality traits. For decades, aficionados of the Labrador Retriever have bred dogs for these exact characteristics. In fact, the breed’s standard—the blueprint breeders use when trying to create the ideal Lab—calls for a nature that is kindly, outgoing and eager to please. Any temperament other than this is considered a severe fault among responsible Labrador Retriever breeders, and Labs with such faults

are eliminated from breeding programs.

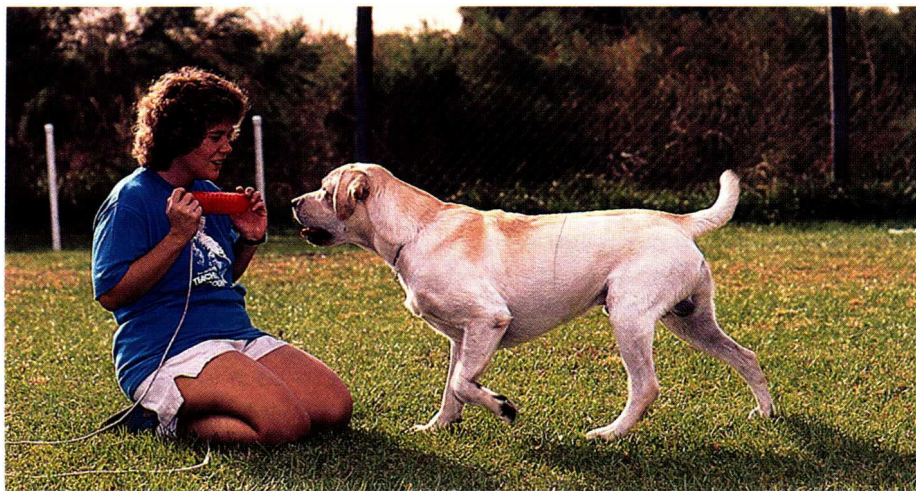
Consequently, Labs are known for their wonderful personalities and rightly so. Few dogs are as happy and human-loving as the Labrador Retriever.

Of course, no breed of dog is right for every person. If you prefer to spend your weekends watching TV instead of hiking, camping or playing a game of catch at the local park, then you probably won’t be happy with a Labrador Retriever. Labs are vital, active dogs with boundless energy and a temperament that screams out, “Exercise me!” If you prefer a dog who will lay curled up at your feet most of the time and be content to just snooze the day away, a Labrador Retriever will drive you absolutely crazy. Instead of an active dog like the Lab, you’d be better off with a more mellow breed. You’ll find plenty of other books on *those* kinds of dogs at your local book store.

The Lab Look

Aside from personality, there are other characteristics that set the Labrador Retriever apart from other dogs. These are physical characteristics that make the Lab *look* like a Lab.

For starters, the Labrador Retriever is a medium-sized dog. He’s larger than a Dachshund yet smaller than a Saint Bernard. Most fully-grown male Labs weigh between 65–80 pounds. Female Labs come in at 55–70 pounds. The males stand around 22½ to 24½ inches at the top of the shoulder,



Labrador Retrievers are fun-loving dogs who require plenty of exercise.

with females a bit shorter at approximately $21\frac{1}{2}$ – $23\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

The shape of the Labrador Retriever's body is also distinctive and helps set him apart from other medium-sized dogs. Labs are strongly built, somewhat stout and athletic. Their body type is conducive to a dog bred to work in the field all day retrieving game.

The head of the Labrador Retriever is also an important factor in what makes a dog a Lab. The Lab's head is wide, with a slightly pronounced brow. The dog's lips fall in a curve toward the throat, and the muzzle is short and on the wider side. The ears hang close to the head and are set low on the skull. The eyes—one of the Lab's most cherished traits—are kind, friendly, alert and intelligent.

To the casual observer, the Labrador Retriever has a somewhat ordinary looking coat. It's not thick

and plush like the Siberian Husky's, nor is it long and flowing like the Afghan's. But although the Lab's coat may seem like typical short dog hair, it's actually an amazing cloak developed over hundreds of years to help the Lab do his job on land and in the water.

If you look closely and study a Lab's coat, you'll see that it's straight and dense, with a soft, weather-resistant undercoat that protects the dog's skin from water, cold weather and the kind of brush and bramble found in the field.

The color of the Lab's coat is also of great interest to those who love the breed. Labs come in three different colorations: black, yellow and chocolate. The black is just that: a jet black color that gleams in the bright sunshine. Yellow Labs range from an orange-red to light cream, with many having darker shading on their ears,

back and underparts. As for chocolate, it can vary in shade from light to dark brown, and is the least common of the three Lab colors.

Of course, the Labrador Retriever is more than just how he looks when he's standing still. Any dog bred to work must be able to move well, too. When a Labrador Retriever starts moving, his stride is free and effortless. Labs that are well bred move straight forward when they trot; they never pace or weave.

Lab Personality

- Great with children
- Easy to train
- Good watchdog
- High energy level
- Happy and friendly

The Breed Standard

In February 1994, the Labrador Retriever Club drafted a revised breed standard for the Labrador Retriever. The American Kennel Club approved that standard, and the document went into effect the following month. Dog show judges use this standard to evaluate Labs presented to them in the show ring, and breeders use it to determine which dogs they will mate to help further the breed. Theoretically, the standard represents the ideal Labrador Retriever—a dog that doesn't exist in real life, but one that breeders strive to create.

The following is the current breed standard for the Labrador Retriever.

General Appearance

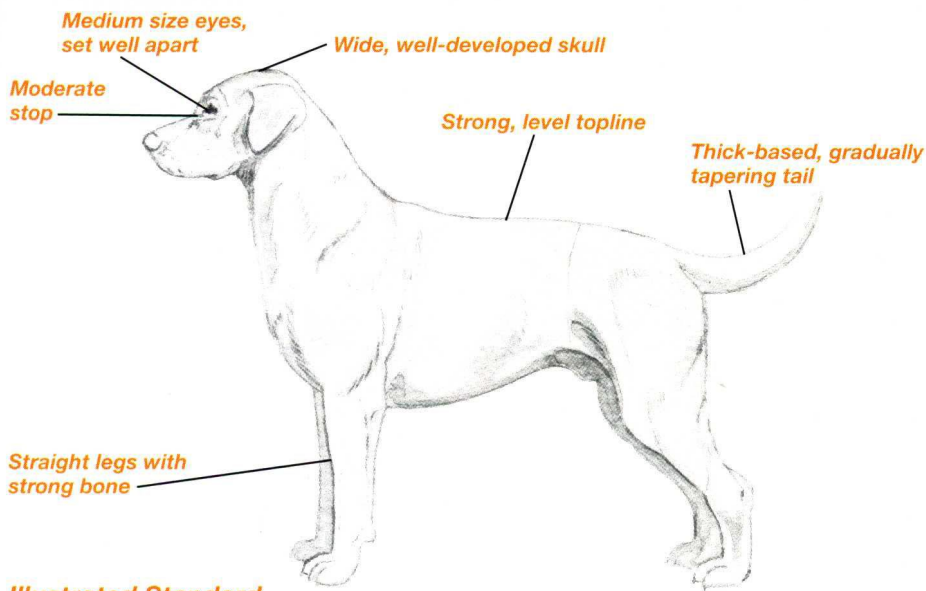
The Labrador Retriever is a strongly built, medium-sized, short-coupled, dog possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation that enables it to function as a retrieving gun dog; the substance and soundness to hunt waterfowl or upland game for long hours under difficult conditions; the character and quality to win in the show ring; and the temperament to be a family companion. Physical features and mental characteristics should denote a dog bred to perform as an efficient Retriever of game with a stable temperament suitable for a variety of pursuits beyond the hunting environment.

The most distinguishing characteristics of the Labrador Retriever are its short, dense, weather resistant coat; an "otter" tail; a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws; and its "kind," friendly eyes, expressing character, intelligence and good temperament.

Above all, a Labrador Retriever must be well balanced, enabling it to move in the show ring or work in the field with little or no effort. The typical Labrador possesses style and quality without over refinement, and substance without lumber or cloddiness. The Labrador is bred primarily as a working gun dog; structure and soundness are of great importance.

Size, Proportion and Substance

Size—The height at the withers for a dog is 22½ to 24½ inches; for a bitch is 21½ to 23½ inches. Any



Illustrated Standard

Color: Black, chocolate, yellow (varying shades)

DQ: Deviation from the height prescribed in the Standard; thoroughly pink nose or one lacking in any pigment; eye rims without pigment; Docking or otherwise altering the length or natural carriage of the tail; any other color or a combination of colors other than black, yellow or chocolate

variance greater than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch above or below these heights is a disqualification. Approximate weight of dogs and bitches in working condition: dogs 65 to 80 pounds; bitches 55 to 70 pounds.

The minimum height ranges set forth in the paragraph above shall not apply to dogs or bitches under twelve months of age.

Proportion—Short-coupled; length from the point of the shoulder to the point of the rump is equal to or slightly longer than the distance from the withers to the ground. Distance from the elbow to the ground should be equal to one half of the height at the withers. The brisket should

extend to the elbows, but not perceptibly deeper. The body must be of sufficient length to permit a straight, free and efficient stride; but the dog should never appear low and long or tall and leggy in outline.

Substance—Substance and bone proportionate to the overall dog. Light, “weedy” individuals are definitely incorrect; equally objectionable are cloddy lumbering specimens. Labrador Retrievers shall be shown in working condition well-muscled and without excess fat.

Head

Skull—The skull should be wide; well developed but without exaggeration. The skull and foreface should