

Chow Chows Revealed

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Foreword

There's a beautiful and ancient fairy-tale that says that while God painted the sky blue, he was followed by a determined Chow Chow who licked up the drops that fell with his tongue. As you know, each fairytale comes with some truth, but this tale has two truths: one, that this breed does have a blue tongue and second, that its origins began with God's Creation!

This is just one of many myths surrounding this breed. Another fascinating myth is the one that tells of the Chow Chow being a descendent of bears rather than wolves. Unbelievable, but could Nature have twisted this breed's evolution just a little?

Whatever the truth may be, you're bound to find that your Chow Chow is a breed apart –that he's not like any other dog breed. Doesn't his independent nature bother you? Or his blue tongue? Or the way he moves? And what about his reserve? Oh, the Chow Chow is certainly different from every other dog breed.

Since ages, the mystery behind this fascinating breed continues. There are those who believe that he is a dog but that he doesn't really behave like any other dog. After all, he goes hunting, but not like proper hunting dogs. He's said to be a guardian but he's not your typical watchdog. He is a companion dog but not like any other we know. He eats what every other dog eats but with so much caution. The sad fact of the matter is that when the Chow Chow enters a dog show, he is judged just like any other breed, by following certain norms to the exclusion of others. This is reason for the decline of the breed. Instead, this breed should be judged on the basis of his behavior, responses and majesty, among others.

History bears testimony that this aristocratic breed was first wowed in England and then everywhere else. In the beginning of the XIX century, this dog was first gifted to the London Zoo as a "half-savage" dog. But in 1880 he entered a dog show for the first time and a decade later the Kennel Club recognized this breed. In 1895, when the first English Chow-Chow Club was founded, it also helped lay the foundations of the breed standard.

Much water has flowed under the bridges since then and Chow-Chow first began appearing on cigarette packs—something that continues to this day. His endearing face can also be seen on tea packets, playing cards, postcards, envelopes and stamps. This is the worldwide popularity of this breed that's loved wherever it goes, despite its unpopular traits.

Chapter 1

The origins of the Chow Chow

Over 2000 or 3,000 years ago, the Chow Chow dog breed first came into existence. It is recognized as the most ancient breed in the world, dating farther back than the 11th century in China. In fact, historians believe that this breed originated in China, and a special reference is always made of the Chow Chow escorting the Tartars when they attacked China.

Then, there are those historians who speculate that this breed originated in the Arctic Circle and then migrated to Mongolia, Siberia and China. Of course, today we know that this breed is a native of Mongolia and Tibet.

In China, however, he was the watchdog of the entire household, and a prized possession to such an extent that Chinese emperors kept 200 Chow Chows for use while hunting. In fact, Chinese authors point out that the Pekingese, Shih Tzus and Lhasas were considered the “Royal Dogs of China,” while the humble and hardy Chow Chow was used solely for hunting.

But in the days before the Chinese took to firearms for hunting, they used Chow Chows as retrievers, pointers and sled dogs. This breed can also be seen sculpted on ancient Chinese pottery and sculptures belonging to the Hun dynasty (206 B.C. until 22 A.D.).

All said and done, the real and true origin of the breed remains unknown. While there are those who believe its earliest ancestor is the ancient Mastiff-type dog that was crossed with Spitz types, still others believe that the Chow Chow is but the ancestor of the modern Spitz, Akita and Shar-Pei.

No matter what its history really is, this thickly coated dog was first bred to be a working dog, capable of surviving the severe Arctic cold. At first, fierce Mongolian tribes kept this breed as hunting and guard dogs, while also using it for its meat and fur.

1 **Two theories:** Would you believe that there are actually two different theories relating to the origin of this breed's name? First, Chow Chow or 'chou' is Chinese slang for edible. This connects well with the fact that the Mongolians and Chinese ate this dog's meat. In fact, Will Judy, author of *The Chow Chow* says that the name Chow Chow means "edible dog of China."

Historians assert that the Chinese and Koreans specially bred these dogs as an epicurean delight, a delicacy to be enjoyed, particularly the smooth-coated dog variety. In 1878, a British historian, whose specialization was Chinese history, claimed to have found 25 restaurants in Canton serving Chow Chow meat on the menu.

Though the Chow Chow originated in northern China, most of this breed was found in Canton, south China, where the local people called him the 'black mouthed dog' since he really did have a very dark blue-black tongue. Despite this, the Chow Chow was a very popular and well-loved breed and history tells us that Genghis Khan had a kennel of 5000 Chow Chows which he took into battle around 700 B. C.

In earlier times, Chow Chows were used as guard dogs in monasteries, besides also being herding and sled dogs. Their meat was also eaten in China until in 1915, the Chinese government enacted a law banning the purchase and sale of Chow Chow meat.

The breed was saved from extinction when, after the cultural revolution in China, they were smuggled out of the country by sailors since the revolution had declared them so useless that they ought to be destroyed.

This apart, in the 13th century, Marco Polo had described the Chow Chow, pointing to the fact that they were common in those days too.

In time, this name slipped into easy everyday parlance to mean food in English. It also referred to the cargoes of spices and mixed pickles from China and it was also taken for a spicy pickle relish.

The second theory, though not logical, is still plausible. Chow Chow in the early 1800s, referred to clipper ships that sailed from China to England and brought back an assortment of cargo.

When they reached a particular port, they had to describe the contents of their cargo. Since they carried an assortment of goods, the term Chow Chow was coined, meaning knick-knacks or bric-a-brac. When the dogs became part of the ship's cargo, the name extended to them too.

But returning to the dog breed, the first of the breed made its appearance in England in the late 19th century and grew popular when Queen Elizabeth took a shine to it. In fact, it was given this name because it had been housed in the ship's chow chow hold all along the long voyage. After finally arriving in the United States in early 1900, the Chow Chow was quickly accepted into the American Kennel Club in 1903 as a member of the non-sporting group.

However, the breed with a regal air that we know it as today is really the result of

how it was treated in England and the United States—a far cry from being a hardy working dog in China and Mongolia. Over the years, the Chow Chow has evolved to be a medium sized dog and is now seen as a popular American dog.

Chapter 2

The Quintessential Chow Chow

The Chow Chow is a stockily built, muscular and medium-haired dog that belongs to the Non-Sporting group. You can recognize it by its large head that's complemented by a broad flat skull, short muzzle and wrinkles on his face. Often, these wrinkles end up forming a deep scowl.

His ears are erect, rounded and small. His tail curls and high above his lower back and he carries it with pride over his back. However, his hallmark is his blueblack tongue, a rarity among all dogs. In fact, this is one of the two breeds of dogs in the world to have a blue-black tongue, the other breed being the Shar Pei, yet another Chinese breed.

Breed standards: The general characteristics of this breed comprise its north Chinese origins, where it was specifically bred as a hunting, pulling and herding dog that also doubled up as a watchdog. Today, it is a companion dog, but it is essential to remember his roots while evaluating his breed type.

Appearance: Your regular Chow Chow is no parlor dog. On the contrary, he's powerful and sturdy, with a stocky build to match. This erect Arctic dog is medium-sized and has a strong muscular body that's complemented by a heavy bone structure. One more interesting feature of the Chow Chow that rates him as distinctive is his erect hind legs.

His body: He has a compact body, short coupled, broad and deep and is supported by straight, strong legs. If you look at him from one side, his hind legs, you'll find, are very slightly angulated while the hock joint and metatarsals lie

directly beneath the hip joint. This structure gives him his trademark short and stilted gait that sets him off as unique.

His head: The Chow Chow carries his skull and stop proudly and erectly. Though they are both large in comparison to the size of his body, it's not disproportionate to make him seem either top heavy or a dog with a low carriage. His top skull remains broad and flat from one side to another and from front to back.

He has perfect bone structure, something that does not detract from his coarse coat and loose skin. If you see his profile, you'll find that the top lines of his muzzle and skull are almost parallel, and are joined by a moderate stop. His stop is made to appear steeper than it really is due to his padded brows.

His muzzle, though short when compared with the length of the top skull, is hardly ever lesser than one-third of the length of his head. His broad muzzle is distinctive in its own way, being well shaped just below his eyes. The depth and width of his muzzle are equal and ideally should seem to be equal from its base to its tip.

His head, as you will see, is large with a short, deep and broad muzzle that's set off by a ruff. He's a fantastic combination of grace and substance that produce an active and agile pet. He may either have a rough double coat or a smooth one, but no matter which he has, he is a unique mix of dignity and sophistication, with his characteristic blue-black tongue, scowl on his face and a stilted walk.

If he looks square, this is achieved by a perfect bone structure, complemented by padding of the muzzle and equally expanded lips. His upper lips cover the lower

lips completely when he closes his mouth, and never hangs loose.

Have you taken a look at his nose? It is large, broad and black with wide nostrils. However, the fault in his nose is that it is spotted or another color but black. Only blue Chow Chows have a deep blue or slate nose.

1 His mouth and tongue: Ideally, to conform to the breed standards, he must have a solid black mouth. You will generally find that the mouths of Chow Chows have lips whose edges are black, and the tissues of their mouth are almost always black, while the gums too are generally black.

This breed's hallmark is its blue-black tongue, and that includes the top surface and its edges—in fact, to be ideal, the darker the tongue the better. The disqualifier is a tongue tinged with red or pink on the top surface and sides or one that has one or more spots of red or pink. (...)

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