

# Los Angeles Times

## L.A. Unleashed

### Some fans of Portuguese water dogs aren't so happy about the Obamas' interest

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Portuguese water dog First Lady Michelle Obama's highly publicized interview with People Magazine, which started dog lovers everywhere talking about the possibility of the president's family bringing home an energetic Portuguese water dog, was big news yesterday.

Even Mrs. Obama's press secretary's comment that the Obamas "have not selected a breed.... Mrs. Obama likes the Portuguese water dog, but she is only one of four votes" wasn't enough to stop tongues from wagging about the allergy-friendly -- and somewhat uncommon -- breed.

"Porties," as the dogs are often called by fanciers, don't need the publicity that such high-profile owners would bring, says Stu Freeman, president of the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America.

Many of the breed's fans don't want to see it saddled with "101 Dalmatians Syndrome" -- a phenomenon often reported by animal rescue professionals who find large numbers of people rushing out to buy the "it" animal of the moment. Once the animal grows and the reality of its needs -- for instance, Dalmatians, while unquestionably adorable, are a high-energy breed whose exercise requirements are too much for many owners -- become clear, the animals wind up dumped in shelters. "There's always the danger of something like that," Freeman told the Associated Press.

And the AP reports on another fear of Portie fans:

[Elena Gretch, a dog trainer and owner of two Portuguese water dogs] worries that if the Obamas choose the breed, puppy mills will sprout up. The dogs cost \$1,800 to \$2,500 and aren't as common as other popular breeds. They're prone to hip dysplasia, so finding a good breeder is important, she said, and the dogs don't often end up in shelters for adoption.

The dogs also require a lot of attention, grooming and outdoor exercise. "It's agile, it's a great swimmer, it loves to be outdoors," said Gretch, founder of the pet care and training service It's A Dog's Life in New York City.

But Portuguese water dogs are usually not great for first-time dog owners, said Freeman, because it takes experience to train them.

"These are dogs that if you don't keep them busy, they will be busy and do something you don't want them to do," he said.

Readers responding to Michelle Obama's comments about the future first dog yesterday were split on the idea of the Obamas bringing a Portie to the White House. What do you think -- is this the wrong breed for the first family, or are some Portie fans just trying to keep the breed all to themselves?

-- Lindsay Barnett

