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DOG FANCY

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DECEMBER 2007

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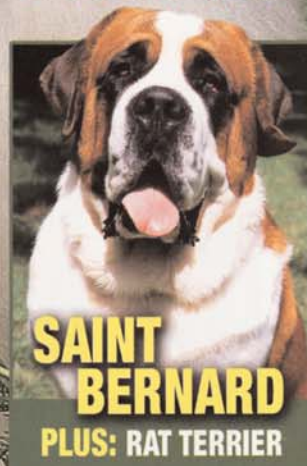
- Cut back on training treats
- Keep his ears healthy
- Try yoga with your dog



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OLD ENGLISH SHEEPDOG

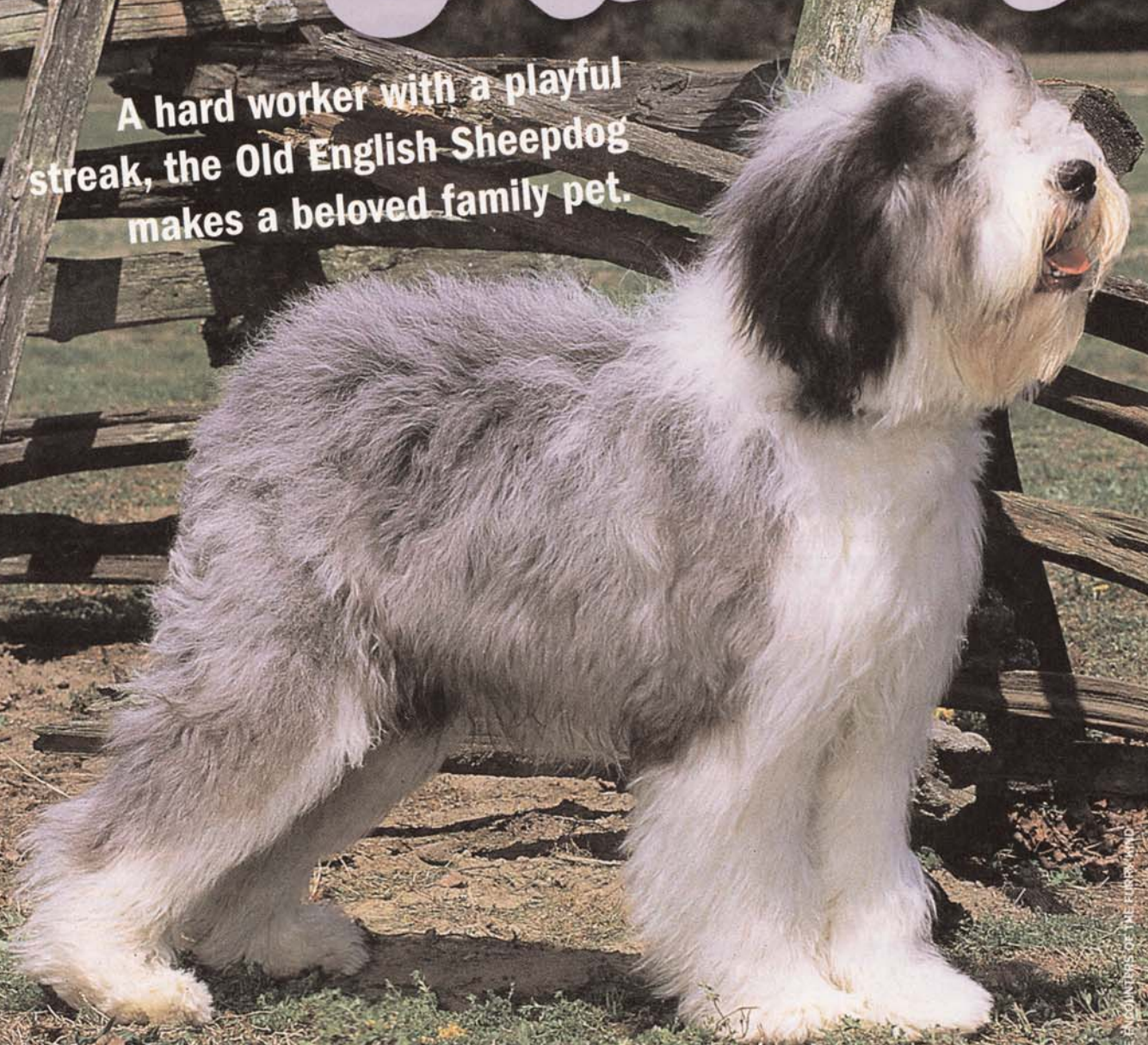
FREE POSTER!



SAINT BERNARD PLUS: RAT TERRIER

Shaggy Sweet

A hard worker with a playful streak, the Old English Sheepdog makes a beloved family pet.



Stickybuns always got a bedtime snack at 10 p.m. Owner Dick Blair

BY TERRY WINKELMANN

doled them out and stored the box on a shelf in the basement stairwell. One night, he left the door ajar and soon found the 5-year-old Old English Sheepdog on the steps with her head in the box, merrily eating her fill. "I dragged her out and shut the door securely," recalls the Abington, Pa., resident. Some minutes later, he heard pounding on the door. "She had gone down the front stairs, crossed the cellar in the dark, and come up the back stairs on the other side, finished off the box, and then wanted to be let back into the kitchen," says Blair, eastern regional director of the Old English Sheepdog Club of America.



PIX 'N' PAGES

With their black button noses, long pink tongues, and hair-covered eyes, Old English Sheepdogs look like big silly powder puffs. And many will attest that they are. But under all that hair lies a determined working dog with a mind of his own.

"They're very intelligent, but boy do they like to have fun with you," Blair says. "I taught my first OES Adelaide to catch a Frisbee. But I never convinced her to bring it back. She'd catch it, drop it, and make me run and get it. She thought catching it was fun, but bringing it back was too much to ask."

Historically used to drive sheep to market, the dogs' slim, muscular bodies are built for efficient movement over long distances. "They're not fast like a Border Collie," Blair says. "They're marathoners, not sprinters."

The instinct to direct and control that comes with herding and driving sheep translates in the home to pets, people, and toys regularly being corralled by the determined dogs. "Sheepies are very good at moving you around in the direction they want to go," says Lita Long, from her home in Clackamas, Ore. She is the past president of the Greater Portland Old English Sheepdog Club. "Parents have to teach their children that there's no running with a Sheepdog around. If you run, the dog won't chase you. He will come around the other direction and stop you. He will knock you down. It's the nature of the beast."

Instinct may rule out chasing as a game, but the OES loves to play

Intelligent and energetic, the Old English Sheepdog makes a great canine athlete in competitive sports such as agility.

and act the clown in other ways.

"You never know what they'll do next," says Woody Nelson, of Georgetown, Md., a longtime breeder and American Kennel Club judge. "This morning Zorba was pushing his water bowl around with his paws while squeaking the squeaky toy in his mouth at the same time."

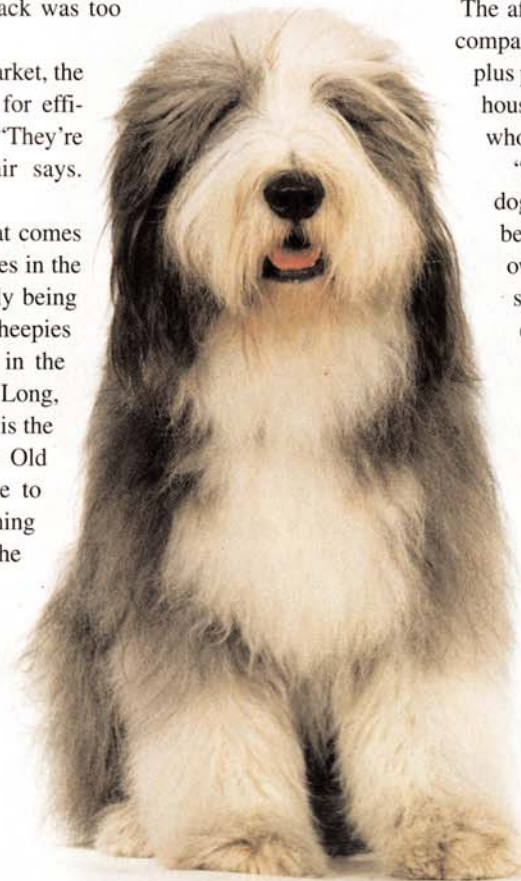
The affectionate and attentive OES can be a good companion to older children who can handle 70-plus pounds at the end of a leash. Other pets in the household usually won't interest the Sheepdog, who will only have eyes for you.

"Sheepdogs are probably the most stepped-on dog on earth," says Blair, "because they want to be with you at all times. I tell new Sheepdog owners: 'The first time you're lifting a pot of spaghetti off the stove, don't step back without looking. There will be a dog there.' They are always underfoot."

While easygoing and willing to adapt to your preferred lifestyle — from couch potato to outdoorsman — Sheepdogs are high maintenance when it comes to grooming. Brushing and bathing a dog, whose hair can grow 14 inches long if not regularly sheared, takes time and patience. Breeders say brushing while watching TV makes the time go faster.

"When they're puppies, it's a half-hour sitcom," Long says. "At 9 months, it's a half-hour game show and a one-hour soap. By the time they're full-grown, it's a movie of the week or a football game."

"That double coat is hot, and it's a lot of work," Blair says.



The easygoing Old English Sheepdog wants to be by your side, whether you are active, lounging, or busy in the kitchen.

BREEDPROFILE

Old English Sheepdog

Country of origin: England.

Original use: Driving sheep and cattle to market.

Group: Herding (AKC and UKC).

Life span: 9 to 10 years.

Color: Any shade of gray, grizzle, blue, or blue merle with or without white markings.

Coat: Long, shaggy, hard-textured, and profuse.

Grooming: Brush thoroughly and often, at least weekly, to control matting; bathe quarterly; shave semiannually.

Height/weight: Males, 22 to 24 inches, 85 to 100 pounds; females, 20 to 23 inches, 65 to 85 pounds.

Personality: Devoted, loving, playful, gentle.

Trainability: High.

Activity level: Moderate.

Known health problems: Hip dysplasia; thyroid, eye, and autoimmune disorders; and rarely, cerebellar ataxia, a neurological disease affecting balance.

Good with children?

Temperamentally yes, but their herding tendencies can make life hard on young children.

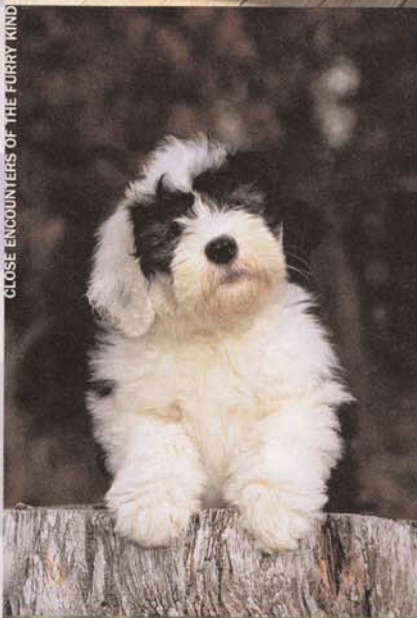
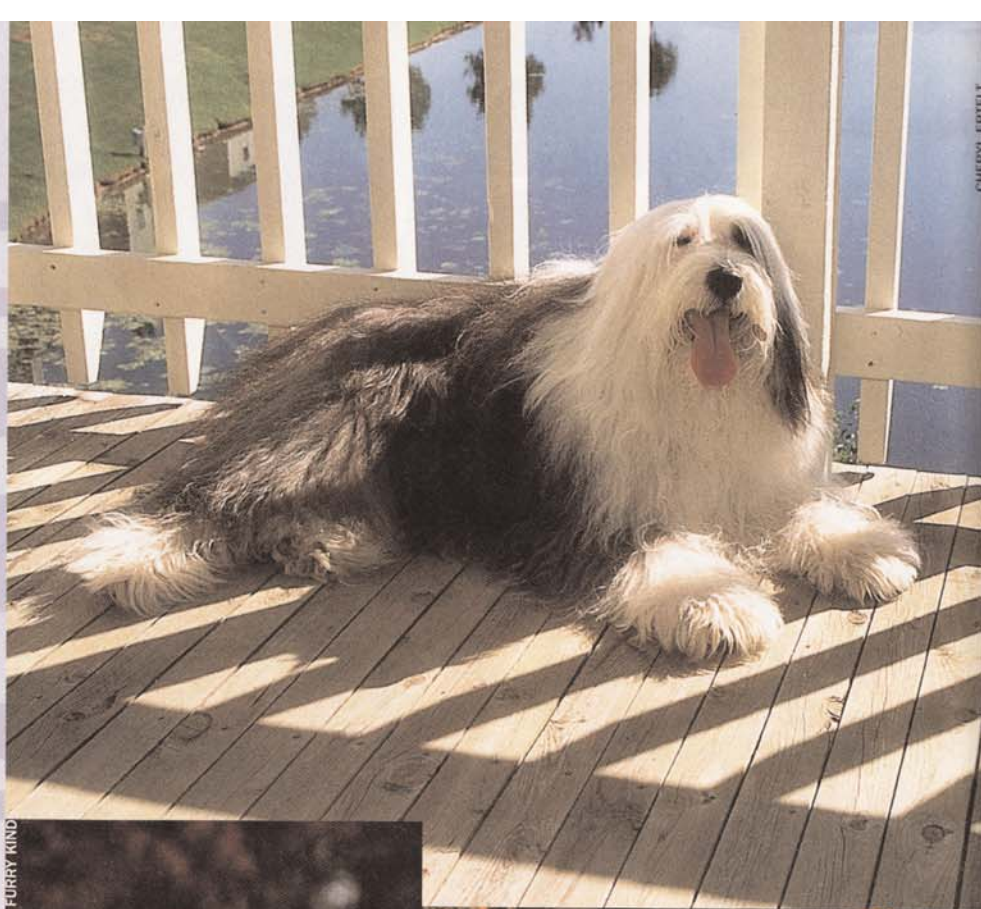
Good with other pets? Yes. They enjoy other dogs and generally ignore other animals.

National breed club: Old English Sheepdog Club of America, Sharon Bodker, secretary; 901 Chagrin River Rd., Gates Mills, OH 44040; bodker@aol.com; www.oldenglishsheepdogclubofamerica.org

Rescue: OESCA Rescue, Christine M. Pesche, national rescue chair; (661) 821-5004, oes@sti.net; www.oldenglishsheepdogclubofamerica.org

More info:

www.dogchannel.com/oldenglish



Playful and friendly, Old English Sheepdogs may use their innate herding abilities to round up their people and other canine friends.

DIANE LEWIS

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FURRY KIND

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