

*They joyfully try
to be whatever
you want, even if
what you want is
a panda bear.*

By Mara Boysun

The
Things
Those
Poodles
Will Do!

It was a dream lineup, the seven beauties vying for Best in Show at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship, in Orlando, Florida, last December.

Still, the moment a black standard Poodle named London sailed onto the blue carpet, all eyes were on him.

With his high-stepping prance and his dense curls painstakingly fashioned into a coif known as “The Continental,” London was the picture of confidence, grace, and elegance, what Fred Astaire

might have looked like had he been born a dog.

No one was surprised when 3-year-old London, known in the formal records as GCh. Jaset’s Satisfaction, was crowned the 2011 AKC/Eukanuba National Champion.

Visit London on his own Facebook page [facebook.com/pages/MBIS-Am-Ch-Jasets-Satisfaction-London/](https://www.facebook.com/pages/MBIS-Am-Ch-Jasets-Satisfaction-London/) 115167681854209.

Much of this poise came naturally. From the time he was in the whelping box, this pup seemed to know he was destined for blue ribbons, says Chris Bailey, London’s co-breeder and co-owner, with Sandra Tompkins, of *Jaset Poodles*.

While his littermates were rough-and-tumbling, London would be off by himself, head up, tail up, the same carriage that captures eyes, and top honors. When asked what makes London a great show dog, Bailey says, “He’s just a great dog. He doesn’t have to be a show dog,” she says. “He’s everything a Poodle should be.”

What’s in a Name?

Poodle. It’s a word that often conjures up images of flashy show dogs like London or tiny fluffy white creatures, nails brightly polished, nestled on the lap of a Hollywood starlet.

It’s this latter image, often expressed as the slur *frou-frou dog*, that keeps people away.

“When I told my husband I wanted a Poodle, he said, ‘Why would you want one of those sissy dogs, with all that hair?’

” recalls Poodle Club of America (PCA) president Helen Lee James, of Littleton, Colorado.

James, an AKC all-breed judge who has been intensely involved in the dog-show world since 1952, was not deterred. She switched from spots, Dalmatians, to curls in 1959.

“Poodles came,” she says. “Poodles stayed. Poodles were superior to the point that none of the other breeds can compete.”

Why? James cites their brains, sense of humor, and inventiveness of mind. Her current resident Poodle, Ari, for example, understands English so well that she and her husband, Howard, speak to him as if he is another human.

Ari, a big, black standard, eats his meals with a Turkish towel under his bowl, like a tablecloth. When he’s finished, he neatly folds it up, corner to corner, and puts it on his bed. No human taught him to do this.

And he is always trying to make his humans laugh, with antics like walking backwards up the

stairs in front of James.

One famous judge and fancier, the late Anne Rogers Clark, put it another way. “They are Labradors with college educations,” she said. “After a day of retrieving, your Lab wants to curl up in front of the fireplace and take a well-deserved nap. A Poodle wants to be the fourth at the bridge table and tell naughty stories.”



This Poodle exhibits the breed’s inborn retrieving and swimming skills, while London, opposite, wows the crowds, sporting a ‘do that takes at least five hours to achieve.

Multifaceted

The Poodle, recognized by the AKC in 1887, occupies spaces in two separate groups. Two size varieties—standard and miniature—have been placed in Non-Sporting, a catchall class containing dogs who do not fit neatly into any work-related category. The third, toys, are aptly in the Toy Group, with the rest of the adorable lap warmers.

James contends that Poodles excel at so many tasks that if they were to be classified by job, they would easily fall into six of the seven AKC groups. They would have, she says, “perhaps a little difficulty being terriers.”

Hunting, retrieving, **herding**, comforting the sick, and just being a friend—you name it, it’s likely a Poodle can do it. Many have multiple titles. Even guarding, an unlikely profession for a creature as amiable as a Poodle, is not beyond their capabilities. James witnessed a formidable protection instinct rise to the surface when an escaped mental patient, screaming, filthy, half-naked, and wild-eyed, tried to enter her home. “My standard let out a roar and lunged,” James recalls. The would-be intruder asked no questions. He turned tail, and fled.

Five Centuries of Fabulous

Archeologists have found curly-coated dogs carved on Roman tombs and monuments, but most Poodle aficionados doubt these ancient stone

images can trace a line down to the modern breed.

Today's Poodle most likely descended from water spaniels, ubiquitous throughout regions now known as Germany, France, and Russia, more than 500 years ago. The name most likely came from *pudelin*, the German verb that means *to splash in water*, and they are superb swimmers and retrievers. Their incredible popularity in France led them to be dubbed "French Poodles," and they have been uttering *Ooh la la's* in cartoons and movies ever since.

Here is just a small sampling of the jobs in which Poodles excel.

Finding Underground Gems

Poodles were the original *truffle dogs*, trained to sniff out the pungent subterranean delicacy. Smaller dogs, the size of small minis or toys, were favored for this job in the 17th century. For the past seven years, a standard Poodle named Ginger has carried on the centuries-old tradition as part of the team at Garland Truffles, in North Carolina. She sniffs out "black diamonds," Perigord truffles, which retail for \$50 an ounce.

Red, white, and blue, black, apricot, silver, and cafe au lait! Poodles come in an array of colors and in a range of sizes to suit everyone.



Do you have a Poodle who has some special talent or does something to make you laugh? Tell us about your dog, or post a video or photo, on the [AKC FAMILY DOG Facebook page](#).

Hollywood icons Cary Grant and Poodle Monsieur Cognac study a script. Below: Truffle-sniffing Ginger.



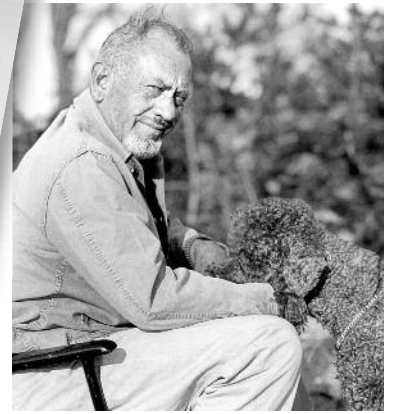
Showing Off

When most people hear the term "*circus dog*," a Poodle is what springs to mind. Quickness of body and brain has made these natural performers the choice of circuses and street performers from the days before P.T. Barnum through vaudeville to early television classics, such as the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

Today, troupes of dancing Poodles are still headliners, as seen in this act from the *Moscow Circus*.

Movies offered another chance to entertain. The Poodle History Project website ([poodlehistory.org](#))

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CARY GRANT PHOTO SUPPLIED BY FILMSTILLS.NET; PHOTO FRANK/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; OT: KIMURA; COURTESY OWNER; BOTTOM ROW: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; APRICOT & WHITE POODLES@NARINA.MASLENKOVA; GRAY/© ERIC ISSELE; © NICOLE NELLY



Clown suit? Scooter? Hair Coloring? No problem! Poodles can assume any role—from joker (top) to literary lion. Center: Steinbeck collaborates with Charley; Right: This Panda Poodle took top honors in an extreme grooming contest.

says the breed appeared in 59 silent films from 1895 to 1930. Modern directors, from Vincente Minnelli to Spike Lee and Tim Burton, have cast Poodles in critical roles. And who can forget the stunning white standard in Christopher Guest’s hilarious satire of the dog fancier’s world, *Best in Show?*

Modeling Good Manners

In 1937, when Helene Whitehouse Walker and Blanche Saunders took their historic 10,000-mile trip across America to introduce the new sport of obedience, standard Poodles were the dogs they chose to demonstrate all the right moves. In a June 17, 1940, *Life magazine* feature on Saunders—“How to Teach a Dog Good Manners Is Shown by Pretty Girl Trainer”—readers are informed, “Because a Poodle is naturally smart, it is easy to teach him manners.”

Consorting with Greatness

It’s impossible to list all the kings, queens, world leaders, artists, and other notables who have loved and been loved by Poodles. Perhaps the most famous was Charley, owned by Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck. The dog accompanied Steinbeck on the trip that led to his 1962 book, *Travels With Charley*. Wrote Steinbeck, “A dog, particularly an exotic like Charley, is a bond between strangers.

Many conversations en route began with “What degree of a dog is that?”

Shape Shifting Poodle cuts orig-



inally developed to help hunting and retrieving dogs move through water and keep joints warm, have given birth to a whole new art form—extreme grooming. Poodles have been transformed into all manner of exotic beast—Clydesdales, camels, crocodiles, bears, birds, and bugs. Karen Stickel, a New Jersey-based professional groomer won a 2008 competition by transforming a black standard Poodle into a panda bear. She says that the hair’s crisp texture makes the Poodle, the “most versatile in terms of creating things.”

Being a Pal

Those who live with Poodles often say their great charm is that they are such “people dogs,” and that they do whatever they can to please you. Whether you want to dash through an agility course, herd sheep, or lounge on a couch, a Poodle will be happy to go along.

“They are game for anything new,” says Bailey. “They just want to do what you’re doing.” 🐾

For more information and to read the standard, visit poodleclubofamerica.org.