Big Black Dog Syndrome

Although no formal studies have been done, anecdotal information shows that big black dogs are harder to re-home. Some shelters even have a name for it, 'Big black dog syndrome', where blackdogs can languish in shelters, passed over for lighter or fluffier looking breeds and mixes.

It's been noted that even Labrador mixes have a hard time finding a forever home within shelters, even though they've long been considered great family dogs. Theories abound as to why they're passed over. Some shelter staff suggest that with big dark eyes and black fur, it's harder to see the expressions on the face of a black dog. Muzzles prematurely grey on a black dog making them appear more senior then they actually are. In the minds of would-be adopters, older equates to shorter life span and the probability of increased vet bills and care.

Black dogs have been referred to negatively throughout history, often as devil dogs or the beasts at the beck and call of Beelzebub. The 'Black Dog of Bungay' refers to a historic event back in 1577 where in Bungay, a little town in Suffolk, a terrifying thunderstorm occurred with such 'darkness, rain, hail, thunder and lightning as was never seen the like.' Storms during that period were greatly feared as most houses and structures were constructed out of thatch and timber and therefore highly flammable should lightening strike. As the people knelt in fear, praying for mercy, suddenly there appeared in their midst a great black Hell Hound. It began tearing around the church, attacking many of the congregation with its cruel teeth and claws. An old verse records:

All down the church in midst of fire, the hellish monster flew
And, passing onward to the quire, he many people slew

Of course, in our enlightened age we would merely say that the church was struck by lightning, but back in a more superstitious age many natural disasters were the work of the Devil.

Black dog also conjures up a negative image as it's a common euphemism for depression, a term coined by Winston Churchill. Here in Australia, we have the Black Dog Institute-a research and educational facility that deals with depression and mood disorders. Even common 'beware of the dog' signs often have big, snarling black dogs on them. On a lighter note, the song 'Black Dog' was a success for legendary English rockers, Led Zeppelin, who used it as the first track off their 1971 album, achieving chart success both here and in the US.

It's fair to say that the image of the big black dog has taken a battering over the years in movies and books like The Hound of the Baskervilles, The Omen, Stephen King's Cujo and most recently the dogs that appear in the Harry Potter books and movies.

Here at Urban Animal, we think big black dogs have some great qualities that people should know about so we've compiled a list.

- Standing next to a black dog will make you look slimmer.
- Black dogs are guaranteed not to clash with your furnishings.
- Black dogs can wear anything and look instantly accessorised.
- Cuddling a black dog can alert you to having a dandruff problem.
- Black dogs keep you warmer in winter.
- Black dogs give you a more formal look but never appear ostentatious.
- Black dogs don't shed if you have black carpeting.
- If you're colour blind, black dogs, unlike red dogs, are visible on green grass.
- A black dog is great for security. At night burglars can't see them and trip over them.
- A black dog day is a good day. How can it be depressing with a wet nose and wagging tail?
- Unlike black cats, black dogs are considered a sign of good luck, especially if you own one.
- Once you go black you can never go back.

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