

Otis the Otterhound



“What sort of hound is that?”

“He’s an Otterhound”

“I’m sorry – if he’s not a hound, what sort of dog is he?”

Yes, this conversation really happens, regularly, when we’re walking Otis around Bath.

He came to us as a rescue, from the Bath Cats & Dogs Home, in January 2003. He was thought to be or 5 months old at the time and one of three puppies up for adoption in Bath. We were told little about his past, but have since heard that other siblings rescued at the same time were re-homed from other RSPCA sites at the same time.

Anyway, we picked the “cheeky” one of the three in Bath – he also seemed to be the best nourished (more on this later!), and had the best eyebrows and cheeriest grin, we thought. We were hooked. And we called him Otis.

“Otis – keen of sight and hearing”
(according to the “Modern Book of Babies Names”, Foulsham, 1988)

We didn’t realise how inappropriate “Otis” might be as a name for an Otterhound – once he’s found a good scent, his sight and hearing switch off completely. This means that he’s not trusted off lead as much as we (and he) would like. He’s pretty good at returning to a whistle, though, when he’s gone off roaming.

He is independent, and, of course, definitely not a retriever. Throw a ball and say “fetch” – and he’ll give you a look that says “You’ve just thrown that ball away, and now you want me to go and bring it back? So why did you throw it in the first place?”. It must be in the genes: Otterhounds follow the scent, and people follow the Otterhounds. Once you’ve grasped this fact of Otterhound life, his behaviour becomes much more understandable.

“Is he a Spinoni?”

Other people’s reaction to Otis is always good. People are always asking what he is – Spinoni is a common guess.

Small children love him (he does look like an overgrown teddy bear or a cartoon dog, after all – check out Floppy from the Oxford Reading Tree books) and his size, shaggy coat and shambling gait are guaranteed to raise a smile. He has even been known to stop the traffic – more than once we’ve had a car pull over and the driver leap out to ask what he is, where he came from, etc.

There was one notable occasion when Otis was seen by a family (Mum, and two children, both under the age of five) and all three were pointing at Otis and rocking with laughter.

As the person on the other end of the lead, all you can do is smile and feel smug!

Most of the time, he lies about the house. In the summer, he loves to stretch out and doze in the sun.

Exercise consists of a walk of about 1½ - 2 hours each day, and as much of it as possible off-lead. Since having Otis, we’ve discovered parts of Bath, and especially the surrounding countryside, that we didn’t know existed. He also has the run of the garden.

“He looks like the dog from Fraggle Rock”

Otis hasn’t been problem-free, though – his murky past has left its legacy.

He has always been ready for a snack but it took us a while to realise that if there was anything left out in the kitchen where we could reach it, then he could reach it too. Several loaves of bread (plastic wrappers included) disappeared, and tubs of margarine were found to have been licked out. He can also be defensive of his food. We put all this down to habits ingrained as a very young pup – and why he was biggest of the three pups at the Dog's home. He is much better than he used to be, but still has to be treated with care around food.

But even though he would eat anything and everything, as a young dog his digestive system couldn't cope. At about 3 years old he was painfully thin, weighing it at about 32kg. He didn't seem to be able to digest the food we gave him; we were worried for him. Then, on the advice of a local vet, we put him on a raw food diet (a mix of raw chicken mince, vegetables, fruit with a dash of olive oil) and within 6 months he was tipping the scales at over 40kg - his ribs had disappeared. A fantastic result!

Treats now consist of raw apple, banana (fresh or dried) and definitely no cheese and no biscuits.

We wouldn't be without Otis, for all his funny ways. He's a member of our family.

