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## Recognizing your dog's personality

A dog is not just a dog. Even dogs belonging to the same breed can't be lumped together under one category. They are each individuals with different strengths and weaknesses, greater or lesser abilities, and distinct emotional lives.

◆ **For your information:** Dogs make very few mistakes. They immediately understand the gesture. This is in contrast to wolves, their ancestors, who don't notice the hint and will make a mistake 50 percent of the time. Scientists at Budapest University have gone a step further using a similar, but much more difficult, experiment: The owner holds a stick behind his back and points it towards the food bowl. It's amazing how some dogs understood even this gesture.

## Learning Ricostyle

Can you still recall Rico (→ pg. 55)? Then maybe you can find out if your dog, too, is a little “Einstein”.

◆ **Exercise:** Have your dog bring you a stuffed toy by name. More precisely: “Teddy, bring me the turtle”.

◆ **Performance:** Practice this fetching exercise repeatedly over several days as part of playtime. Wait until you're certain that your dog has mastered the task before adding another stuffed animal, let's say in this case, a lion. The first five to ten times continue calling for the turtle, and then call for the lion. The dog will be confused and won't know exactly what to do. That doesn't matter. Just pick up the lion and put it in the dog's mouth, saying repeatedly “lion”. After a few days, the dog will associate the word with the object. That's when you put him to the test: With the lion and the turtle lying in front of the dog, you order him to bring you the turtle. If he makes the right choice, he's learned the lesson.



*Give a toy a name and have your dog bring it to you.*

◆ **Increasing the difficulty:** If your dog can match your words to two stuffed animals, you can expand his “vocabulary” to other stuffed toys.

## The shell game

The aim of this game is once again to test how well your dog can pay attention.

◆ **Preparation:** Take two identical cups or food bowls, turn them upside down, and place a treat under one of them. The dog is watching as you do this.

◆ **Performance:** Now, with your hands push the cups around, making overlapping circles. The dog's job is to follow with his eyes the cup that's hiding the treat. You should suddenly stop moving the cups when they're lined up horizontally in front of you. Now give the "search" command. Will your dog find the cup with the treat?

◆ **For your information:** During testing, our dogs were curious and focussed their attention on following the movements of the arms and hands. The success rate was 50%, which is to say that it was probably luck when the dogs made the correct choice. The dogs were just as disappointed as we were. What was the reason for the sobering results? We tried slowing down our circling movements. Again, there was curiosity and wonder on the part of the dogs, but no improvement in the results,

even when we turned over the cups so that the dogs could see and smell the food. Each dog was visibly confused. What's your dog's success rate?

## The cheating game

Do you still remember Gina, the dog that went for the forbidden treat while her mistress's face was hidden from her by a newspaper she was pretending to read (→ pg. 60)? At the Max Planck Institute I got to witness a similar test, one that you can easily duplicate. Maybe your dog is also a small-time cheater.

◆ **Preparation:** Sit down in a chair and make yourself comfortable. Your pet is at a short distance from you and has a good view of you. Lying on the floor in front of both of you, about six to ten feet away, there's a tasty treat. Give your dog the "down" command and forbid him to grab the treat. Any attempt to get near it is met by a sharp "stop!".

◆ **Performance:** Close your eyes. What happens now? You can get a description of your dog's behavior from somebody who's watching from a distance. Probably the dog will start looking back and forth between you and the treat, giving the impression that he's testing his owner's reaction. No reaction from you is taken as a green light for him to go for the treat. But before this happens the dog is restless, often scratching himself, and the sight of the treat makes his mouth water. He'll walk slowly towards the temptation without losing sight of you. One can see that he knows that he's cheating.

## TIP

### Young dogs

Young dogs (under six months old) are only too happy to play, and they're not yet able to concentrate on given tasks – apparently just like little children. You have to take this into account. Let your puppy play with other dogs, and stimulate its senses by taking it on walks where it will learn to deal with its surroundings through playing. Of course, each dog develops differently.

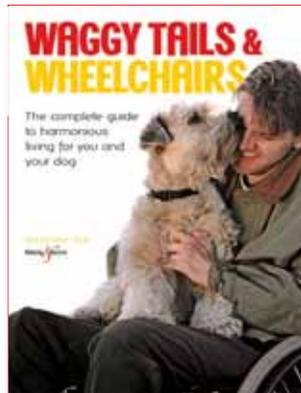
## The author

Dr. Immanuel Birmelin has devoted over 25 years to investigating the behavior of animals in zoos, circuses and the home. He has intensively studied pet behavior and was able to demonstrate through tests that dogs have the ability to reason. We must therefore realize that dogs are not weak-willed servants of man, but rather thinking, sensitive fellow creatures. The dog owner who accepts this fact will find it considerably easier to teach his dog many things. The need for intensive drilling is not as great as previously assumed. This was the subject of Immanuel Birmelin and Volker Arzt's film, "Dog or cat – which is smarter?" that created a sensation in 2003. This was followed by guest appearances on television talk shows. In addition, the author is active as a scientific advisor for animal film productions and as an authority on the correct care of animals.

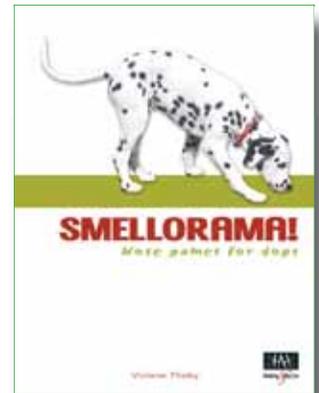
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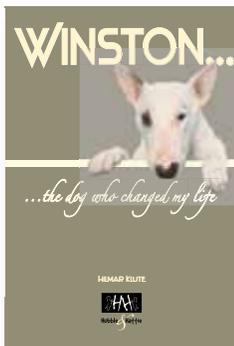
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