

Are Sled Dogs Part Wolf?

Watching the movie, *Balto*, makes us think that sled dogs are part wolf. Are they?

Historically, some dogs used to haul freight and mail in Alaska were mixes of wolves and dogs. Stories like *Call of the Wild* and *Balto* show these wolf dogs. People who study wolves say that wolves are primarily hunters. They do not pull. If a sled dog were part wolf, would it be a good sled team member? Possibly, however, some research shows that wolf dog mixes inherit the worst traits of both animals. They usually aren't good with children and can be unpredictable.

Sled dogs, on the other hand, are well socialized. Veterinarians on the Iditarod race report that sled dogs enjoy human interaction, don't mind being examined at the checkpoints, and are happy, well-adjusted animals. They are motivated by love for their owners and handlers, being willing to do what they can to support the team for the goal of running and pulling the sled.

Both wolves and sled dogs howl. According to Amy Robinson, dog expert for Sniff & Barkens',

"Siberian huskies, malamutes, and any sled dog mix love to exercise their vocal chords. Their howls are musical rather than sorrowful. These working dogs have the adventurous trait of wanting to see what is over that next hill, and since they often live in groups with other like-minded dogs, howling becomes a bonding activity between them."

Wolves howl to gather the pack together and to warn other packs to stay out of their territory.

Size is also a difference between wolves and dogs. An Alaskan Husky averages 55 pounds, whereas, according to *Alaska Fish and Wildlife News*, an Alaskan adult male wolf average 100 – 110 pounds.

So, if not half wolf, half dog, what **are** the sled dogs of today? Most mushers would say their dogs are mongrels. Their origin is from native Alaskan dogs mixed with hound, setter, even Border collie. Most mushers race Alaskan Huskies as their sled dogs, though Siberian Huskies are preferred by a few.

Although wolf dog mixes don't do well at pulling sleds on teams, wolves and dogs are definitely alike in many ways and each has an important place in our world.



