

Diesel (Lincolnshire)

Diesel is living with me (Louise Croxton, Central West Area Coordinator) as my foster dog in rural Lincolnshire. He is a four year old black and tan male and he is neutered, vaccinated and microchipped. I picked him up on 18th September from Ruth Armstrong, another volunteer, who had collected him from the kennels he had been in. In the two hours that Ruth and her husband had been with Diesel he had already become very attached to them and seemed less than pleased to be handed over to me! It was obvious from the very beginning that Diesel does form a strong bond with people and now that he has been with me and my partner a couple of months he is very attached to us – which is unfair on him – and I think it would be best to find him his forever home as soon as possible.



When I got him home he met my dogs with no fuss whatsoever and seemed to settle straight in to our home. In fact, I was amazed that after months in kennels and, prior to that, being stray on the streets, he didn't have a single accident in the house. He ate happily and slept quietly that night and didn't show any of the usual signs of anxiety and distress that rescue dogs often show when undergoing so many confusing changes. This brings me to the second of Diesel's character traits: his confidence. He is not fazed by anything. He is pretty independent and not at all clingy or insecure.

Within a few days of bringing him home I was able to walk him off lead in the large forests close to our house with my dogs and he would stay very close to me and come back instantly on hearing his name. He loved nothing more than to carry and fetch a stick and seemed thrilled to be out and about. It was on these walks however that Diesel's one main negative trait revealed itself. He would run up to me and circle behind my legs and, as he came by me, he would jump up and nip my hand/wrist/arm and bark excitedly. If I raised my voice, kneed him away from me or tried to grab his collar he would become increasingly



confrontational so I opted for simply putting him back on the lead when he started this behaviour and ending the walk. However, he would then try to rip the lead out of my hand and play tug of war. Again, any attempt to stop him would be met with threatening behaviour and it became very clear to me that Diesel saw himself as the boss and was not going to take direction from some woman he'd only known a couple of days.

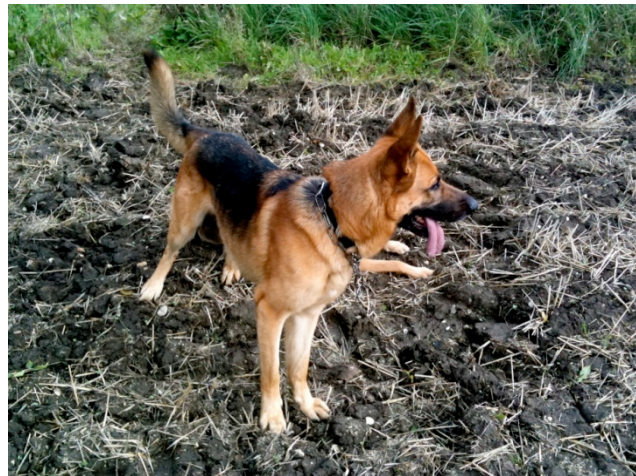
I observed that Diesel would react with some fear to men when they raised their voices but would react with nothing but defiance to women. From what we know of

Diesel's past he has not had a female handler or lived in a family environment before. I believe he was a 'guard dog' (I use that term loosely because he isn't trained – he was probably just left in a back yard to do his duty) for a man who owned a shop before he became stray and spent time in kennels.

The following month was something of a battle of wills in which it was a daily challenge for me to assert myself as leader. I had to work very hard to get his respect and obedience and I had to be ruthlessly strict about his routine and about the rules of the house and about what was and was not acceptable behaviour around me and my other dogs. He is a smart boy and if he senses that you don't really mean something or that a certain rule may be flexible

then he will exploit that to the fullest. He will also try to dominate people who are unsure of him by jumping up, nipping, barking, or circling around them.

Another manifestation of Diesel's dominance was his disgust at being left alone! He damaged door frames and handles in the house trying to get free and would jump up at windows and kitchen worktops. We decided to crate train him and since then we've had few problems with leaving him alone. He can be vocal when he first realises you are leaving, but he calms down eventually. He is happy with a bone or Kong® and seems to enjoy being in his crate.



We dealt with Diesel's various issues by adopting a very firm, but fair, approach and only giving him attention and affection when he had truly earned it. As with all dogs his behaviour is at its most challenging when he hasn't had sufficient exercise, but after a long off lead walk or a bike ride he will chill out.

I managed to curb Diesel's jumping up and nipping through sound aversion, but he does still get very excitable and hyperactive at the beginning of a walk. An experienced and confident large breed owner would not be unsettled by any aspect of his behaviour as he is in no way nasty or dangerous, but a less experienced owner would definitely find him intimidating and hard to handle. He is simply testing the boundaries and any time he senses a weakness in his handler he will try and take the mickey. This can be a bit tiring, but if you want to be the proud owner of a big, handsome, confident dog then that is often the price you pay.



I can now take Diesel pretty much anywhere without having to worry about him. He is fine around older kids (i.e. 12 years upwards) but I have not had him around younger kids as he could accidentally knock them over very easily. Cats are unknown. He is friendly to visitors once they are in the door but he is territorial about the house in terms of reacting to noises

outside the door and on the street. He has accepted being washed and groomed and I have even managed to clip some nails. Health-wise he is in great shape, has clean teeth, healthy bowel movements etc. and is vaccinated and microchipped.

He is good with other dogs and will largely ignore them or sniff and move on when he meets new dogs. He is quick to tell them off if they try to dominate him or take a toy from him but he is not aggressive. He can get jealous of other dogs and I have to be very firm about not letting him barge my dogs out of the way when they are getting a stroke. He is a bit of a ladies man and is very attached to our bitch Carla. Speaking of which, Diesel was castrated in October but because he is already well into adulthood this will not make too much

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dogs.

difference to his interest in bitches in season etc. as this is learned behaviour. He will still show dominance towards other males, but is unlikely to start a fight.

Diesel will happily walk on a short lead as long as he has already had a chance to burn off energy first. For this reason he would be best suited to a rural or semi-rural home. I tend to do the first walk of the day off lead so he can burn off some energy and then later I might walk him round the village on a short lead. He can be strong on the lead if he sees something he's interested in so he will need a handler who can hold him. Saying that, he is still very slim and lean from his days on the streets and in kennels and only actually weighs about 30kg which is not much for an adult male GSD.



Diesel will make a great dog for someone who knows and understands the breed. He is playful, energetic, quick to learn, forms a strong bond with his owner and is sociable with other dogs and strange people when introduced properly. He has no major bad habits besides the fact that he is boisterous and really needs a strong leader. I have no doubts that if he went to the wrong home he could potentially become a big problem and that is why we are going to be picky about where he goes. This dog needs clear, consistent leadership and I can't stress that enough. He is smarter and stronger than some people so really needs someone who will not back down to him and will demonstrate their intelligence through strong leadership and giving him the training and mental stimulation he needs to thrive.

