

Persian Purrsonality

What life is really like with this fabulous feline.

By Nikki Moustaki

“The Persian personality is probably the breed’s best quality,” says Meredith Fogle of Gaithersburg, Maryland, owner of seven Persians. “Our visitors are often familiar with the cat’s reputation of being moody and aloof, but they frequently comment on how friendly Persian cats are. Fogle says the Persian is incredibly affectionate—it wants to be close to its human family members, curling on a lap or sitting next to them with a comforting purr. “They’re a sweet and gentle breed, usually quiet and low-key, equally content to play as to curl up in basket next to a warm fire. In my eyes, what’s not to love about a Persian? I think they’re the most beautiful cat breed, inside and out.”

That’s lofty praise for a cat, but the Persian isn’t just a measly kitty—it’s a regal feline through and through. It took a few hundred years for the Persian to transform from a rare jewel owned only by nobles to one of the most popular cats in the world. To Persian lovers, the breed is still a rare jewel, and just like diamonds, each Persian is unique—though it might not seem that way at first glance.

“Like children, they’re all different,” says Dawna Roskelley of Konfettikat Persians in Brigham City, Utah. “One of my younger females is really quite standoffish, but I adore her look and consider it a challenge to get a purr out of her. Another is a clown who wants to be held constantly and adores our grandchildren. A third is willing to play at any time, yet appears to be laid back and happy just to have some attention,” Roskelley says. Although Roskelley says males are often more affectionate than females. “I don’t think there isn’t any one personality type among Persians, and I’ve had all varieties,” she says.

Though it might not be easy to pinpoint exactly what type of personality your kitten will develop when it gets older, there are some things that you can count on from the breed in general.

“Persians love interaction from their owners, and ours will make a point of finding out where we are and ask to be picked up and cuddled,” says Gina Hancock of Western Cape, South Africa, who owns seven Persians with her husband, Mike. “We have a stationery business and have a separate shop adjoining the house, so when I’m in the shop, one or two of the cats will make a point of being in there with me.” Hancock says initially the cats will cry to be picked up, but then they walk around in the shop and settle in a corner or on one of the cat climbers that they’ve positioned in the shop for the cats. “They’ll lie on a book we’re reading, the computer keyboard or the mouse, and in front of the paper exit from the printer just to make sure we stop what we’re doing and pay attention to them!” Hancock says.

Roskelley says some of her Persians will hide when company’s over, but others will want to be the center of attention. “It never fails if someone is shy about cats, they’ll have a cat in their lap in no time at all,” she says. “I like to know how a person feels about that and if they have allergies to cats before I allow the cats to accost them.”

Like most cats, you can count on your Persian to have the “curiosity gene,” getting into some mischief now and then.

“They’re incredibly observant and curious,” Hancock says. “This is generally the case with all cats, but Persians are right up there when it comes to being curious. Move an item of furniture and your Persian will notice immediately—it will gaze intently at the place where it should’ve been, then fix you with a stare. They say curiosity is a sign of intelligence—Persians have it!”

Molly Barr, of Mythicbells Persians in Vallejo, California, says her Persians definitely fit the Persian personality, but that each one is very different, with individual quirks and preferences. “They’re people-oriented and like to be wherever I am,” Barr explains. “What you often read about the personality traits of the various Persian colors seems to be somewhat true with my bunch. The Himalayans are very affectionate and devoted to me, the first to cuddle and get on my lap. The shaded silver is a sassy little character, and the shaded goldens are a bit more on the quiet, sweet side. The tabby is just plain fun and super cuddly and affectionate.”

The Joint Is Jumpin’

Well, maybe it’s not jumpin’ exactly—maybe it’s more like snoozing on a faux-fur bed. The Persian’s certainly a playful cat and won’t hesitate to chase small prey, but in general, the breed’s a little bit more laid back than your average cat.

“Persian kittens are quite playful, but they aren’t totally overwhelming,” Barr says. “Adult Persians do tend to be fairly sedentary, but my 14-year-old cat still has her playful spells, and the younger cats go through their daily playful bouts and race madly around the house. I also built high climbing places for them in my home, as well as a tree in their enclosure—Persians do climb!”

Hancock also says Persians have a lower energy level than most shorthaired breeds. “This doesn’t mean that they do nothing, as many people seem to think, but they’re just not as interested in summoning up the energy for extra big leaps and scrambles over a fence, or climbing to the very top of a big tree so that they can leap nimbly onto your roof and across to the neighbor’s roof,” Hancock explains.

Fogle says that her Persian’s energy expenditure consists mainly of finding a sunny spot for a nice long nap. “The kittens, of course, are full of energy and love to play and to be played with,” she says. “They’re so fun to watch as they practice stalking each other—with their bushy tails wiggling low to the ground as they crouch until their sister comes close enough to tackle with a flying leap, which quickly becomes a ball of meowing, wrestling fur.”

The Funny Things They Do

Persians—well, most cats—are often more amusing to watch than television, especially if there’s something to chase or some strategically placed catnip nearby. They’re your very own reality television show.

“Our cats tend to do funny things every day,” Fogle says. “They sit in funny positions, drape themselves over people and furniture, chase their tails, investigate shadows, and tackle and torture each other, but also lovingly groom one another, too. These things seem to be typical of the breed—all of our cats exhibit these behaviors.”

When strangers come into the house, no doubt your Persians will be more than a topic of discussion—it just might be sprawled in the middle of your cheese plate. “All of the cats are different with company,” Barr says. “A couple of them are ambassadors and meet the company at the door. One has a foot fetish and wraps herself around their feet.”

Ideal Owner

“The ideal Persian owner is someone who has the time to keep the cat properly groomed on a daily basis,” says Susan Fillis owner of the Persians Of Lark Hill Cattery in Portland, Oregon. “A household with too much noise and activity may not be a wise choice for a Persian cat.”

Persian owners also have to field a lot of funny questions and comments, primarily about that characteristic face. “People will say, ‘It looks like someone hit it in the face with a tennis racquet!’” Hancock says. “This isn’t funny to us, but a surprising number of people think that the idea of a Persian getting its flat face due to manual intervention is quite funny!”

No matter the comments, the Persian is priceless. This gentle beauty has pranced its way to the top of the feline food chain, and its popularity isn’t going to waver anytime soon.