

## *Russian Lapdog*

In this article I would like to tell you about our native breed -- Russian lapdog. There are no too many breeds fancied in our county. From the top of my head I can remember only two: the Russian colored lapdog (Tsvetnaya Bolonka) and the toy-terrier. To compare, there were quite a lot of working dogs and hounds, but so very few of purely decorative breeds. But how good they are! The Russian colored lapdog is a unique species of Bichons. It is absolutely perfect from the tip of the nose to the tip of its tail.

### History of the Breed

The history of the Russian colored lapdog, bred in Leningrad, was inseparably associated with the infancy of all dog-breeding in this city. In the early 50-s, a group of enthusiasts led by Zhanetta A. Chesnokova put the goal to breed a national decorative dwarf pet. Among this group, Julia M. Zvonareva, Diana A. Ovcharenko, Galina A. Isayeva could be singled out.

It should be mentioned that in general Russian toy-dog breeding had been in a very poor status for a long while, and it had developed in very hard conditions. Here is what respected Zhanetta Chesnokova, who had chaired the pet section of the Leningrad Hunting & Fishing Society (LHFS) for a decade (1961 – 1971), wrote about this: "During the period of the Soviet System, decorative dogs were exhibited at practically every dog show along with other dogs, but the quantity, and more importantly, quality of such dogs at these shows was far from the same. At the first post-war show in 1946, only two pets were represented (a lapdog and a toy-terrier). These figures display the exceptionally difficult conditions under which enthusiasts of decorative breeds started their pet-dog breeding in Leningrad and the rest of our Motherland."

As I said, origin of the Russian colored lapdog breeding goes back to the 50s; to be more precise, 1951, when a group of Leningrad dog-fanciers got the first black lapdog from coupling of a coffee and a white color dogs. The black dog was called Tin-Tin. There were so few suitable by phenotype dwarf dogs available, that a white-color stud Trifon was brought to Leningrad from Hungary, and a coffee-color female lapdog Zhuzhu was bought from a touring then in Leningrad circus. Several attempts were made to add blood of some other foreign dwarf breeds, like the Maltese, Bolognese, Shi-Tzu and a few more.

Later on, the black Tin-Tin and Trof produced a coffee-color lapdog Lyu-Lyu, who in her turn, coupled with white Yozhik (Hedgehog) gave two litters, both with black and white puppies. By the end of the 50s, through thorough matching and strict selection based mostly on phenotype and later on the quality of litter, a reasonably homogeneous population has been achieved; it got the status of a breed group.

Here are the major milestones of the breed history put in a short chronology:

1951 – the first pair of dogs of black and brown colors;

1952-1961 – steady growth of the population of the Russian color lapdogs; austere selection work is carried out to shape the typical image of the breed and fix the desirable characteristics;

1958 – the first record in the breed book of LHFS under the title "Lapdog" ("Bolonka");

1962 – Leningrad Cynology Council under the State Hunting Inspection introduced

and approved temporary expert regulations on expert examination and taxation of pet dogs (that favored our breed to a big extent);

1962-1965 – work on elaborating standards of the breed group is under development;

1965 – 278 dogs exhibited at the 50th jubilee show; that included the colored ones;

1966 – the all-union cynology Council approved the standard;

1967 – the colored dogs appeared in Moscow, at the second all-union show;

1969 – 15 dogs were shown at the 51st show held by LHFS in Leningrad;

End of the 60-s – early 70s – population of the color lapdogs is about 100 phenotypically close dogs;

1973 – 57th hound and pet dog show: 10 colored lapdogs;

1974 – 58th hound and pet dog show: already 43 (!) colored lapdogs;

1978 – 62nd hound and pet dog show: 24 colored lapdogs;

As of the late 70-s – early 80-s Leningrad transfers the “garland” to Moscow.

Colored lapdogs in Moscow.

The first colored lapdogs appeared in Moscow in the beginning of the 70-s:

6 dogs of the breed were presented at the 2nd city show of MCODF in 1974;

5 dogs represented at the 3rd show;

9 dogs represented at the 4th show;

3 dogs at the 5th show of MCODF in 1977;

As of the end of the 70th, the breed is relatively successful in Moscow: many dogs (more than several hundreds), many breeders.

The 80-s and the 90-s turned out to be the most dramatic years for the breed. The number of dogs in Leningrad does not grow; interest in the breed goes down, while more and more appreciators of colored lapdogs appear in Moscow. In the beginning of the 90-s, the breed practically disappeared in Leningrad. On the contrary, several new big private breeding kennels of colored lapdog breeding appeared in Moscow.

Characteristics of the Russian colored lapdogs

The most distinctive feature distinguishing it from other breeds (that is, French Bichon fries, maltese, Italian Bolognese, lion dog Coton de Tulear) is its colors. Any solid color but white is permitted. No secret that the latest trends of the breed evolution specify the exterior of colored lapdogs. Succession of generations is very clear in these aspects: we can see that most of the breeders favor solid colors, such as black, brown, apricot, gray, and fauve. So far, tan color is also acceptable.

Another issue worth speaking about in details is the size and weight. Historically, Russian colored lapdogs have been a dwarf breed; the top and bottom limits of height and weight were accepted for regulation of breeding, as well as desirable optimal values of those. Of course, these traits are still subject to discussion among the colored lapdog breeders, but the most appropriate values for both studs and bitches are: height in withers 20-24cm, weight 3-kg.

Of course, at the first look at a colored lapdog one cannot avoid marking its rich coat. Russian colored lapdogs have long, thick wavy or slightly curly wool with clear underwool. Special attention should be paid to the fringe of the muzzle. Dogs with the richest decorating wool should be on higher demand in breeding. Besides their exterior, behavior of all representatives of the breed is of top importance. Lapdogs have a pretty stable psyche. And each dog is individuality. At the same time, dogs of the breed are very gregarious, affectionate, and friendly, but

in no way obsessive. It is always interesting and easy with them. Lapdogs without any problems get assimilated with children in families; they can easily find common language with each family member, be that a child, or an adult. Presence of any other animal in the apartment or house will not make any trouble. Lapdogs effortlessly get along with everybody, were this a cat, another dog, any other animal, or even a bird.

A special role among the doubtless advantages of colored lapdogs plays their size and weight. You can easily take your favorite in any trip – a carrier with it will not weigh down your hand; what is even more important, their good travel flexibility and capability to get easily adapted in a new place makes them ideal companions and fellow travelers in any journey. Colored lapdogs are unpretentious in food. I am sure the question how to feed your pet never turns into painful hesitations “What to do?” or “How to act?” Dry feed or natural food flavored according the age and physiological condition with vitamins and mineral balancers – it's up to you and your pet. In any case, both options are acceptable. All these characteristics are, in my opinion, the best proof that the colored lapdogs are ideal home pets, pleasing your eyes and creating warmth and coziness in your home.

Russian colored lapdogs today

Russian colored lapdogs become more and more popular. The number of people genuinely liking this breed and interested in its further progress grows in many cities of Russia and abroad. Since the early 90-s, there appeared many breeding kennels in Moscow, development of which gave a new start to the breed evolution. There appeared several breeding types, presently competing with each other. Refraining from evaluation of the population of these breeding kennels and expressing personal preferences, I would like to mention the great work carried out by these breeders and the great results they have achieved. Ultimately, we can say that growth of the number of dogs makes good for the breed as a whole. And that encourages a lot.

Since the early 90-s, the breed had practically extinct in Leningrad – St. Petersburg. Only by the end of the century, the breed started to reappear in St. Petersburg. Presently, several major independent St. Petersburg centers direct and supervise the breed development in the entire Northwest region.

In 1999, National mono-breed club of fanciers of the Russian colored lapdogs was established. Currently, it joins together a big number of the breed fanciers all over Russia, this way supporting the progress of the breed as a whole.

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