

## **Frightened Freddie or Fearless Fostic?**

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Here we have the Miniature Pinscher, King of Toys. In the show ring or not, whether on the floor or on the table, he is standing tall and proud. A dog full of confidence shot through with glints of impishness and unpredictable bouts of mischief. A dog that sparkles with an air of electricity. This is the image we all conjure up when we think of the Min Pin, but how often does this image match reality? How much more often do we see dogs with their tails plastered to their butts? Dogs with ears pinned back? Dogs in the ring, on the table, either shying away from the judge or attempting to fear bite? Dogs with names like "Hell on Fire" hiding behind their owner's legs, shaking all over? There is no denying the fact that some of this behavior is bad temperament and those dogs do not belong in the show ring or in any breeding program. However, in over 25 years of breeding show dogs it is my experience that more often than not it is a case of poor socialization - or no socialization at all.

I fully concede that socializing puppies properly is a tremendous amount of work. Breeding quality dogs is a tremendous amount of work. Given the importance of proper socialization, why put all the work into selecting the proper dogs to mate, maintaining the health of the bitch in whelp, delivering and caring for newborn pups, and then stop there? Socialization is the natural, next step and should begin when the pups reach four days of age. At that time you should handle each pup in the litter at least three times a day. As they gain strength, handle them more frequently. When the pups reach the age of three weeks, take one pup at a time and place it inside your shirt while you walk around the house or sit and watch TV. This is done every night, without exception, making sure each pup gets his turn. This continues until the pups reach six weeks of age, at which time you introduce them to children. This is a lot easier when you have children living at home, but do not let that deter you. My children are now grown, so I put notices saying "WANTED - CHILDREN" on church bulletin boards. There is no paucity of response and upon explaining to the parents that I want to borrow their children to help socialize young pups, I get more kids than I can handle! Beginning at 6 weeks of age and continuing until 3 months, have children come to your home a minimum of three times a week for one hour of play with the puppies. Often the parents come with the children, which is great. This way both parents and children learn how to properly play with young pups. While gaining the benefit of the socialization of your pups, you are laying the foundation to teach responsible dog ownership.

When the pups reach three months of age, I feel they have had enough immunizations to risk taking them out into the world. After lead breaking them, you're off to see the wizard, three days a week, rain or shine. The shine part is definitely the best, as you can take an X-Pen and go to an elementary school's playing field area. After setting up and making sure the lid on the X-Pen is firmly secure, take one pup at a time out on a lead. Make certain you have a plastic baggie full of the pup's favorite treats. When the kids flock around - and they always do - give the treat to the child and ask them to feed it to the puppy. It's amazing how rapidly the dogs reach the point where the outreached hand of a stranger brings a wagging tail and a quizzical look that asks "where is my treat?" Rainy or snowy days are more of a problem. This entails scouting out every strip shopping center in town until you find one that has some type of overhang. Walking your dog back and forth beneath the overhang will eventually produce some willing souls to feed your dog some treats and give him a few friendly pats.

If you will continue with this program until your dog reaches a year of age you should find yourself with a happy, animated, fearless Min Pin. The kind we all like to imagine. Good luck!