



## Breed Fads Are Bad for Dogs. Just Look at the Tibetan Mastiff

Once a status symbol in China, costing as much as \$250,000, the dogs are now being sold for their meat. It's important to remember, though, that breed fads are also a problem in the U.S.

**Lisa Plummer Savas** (<http://www.dogster.com/author/lisa-plummer-savas/>) | May 14th 2015

From Lassie to Rin Tin Tin, Frank the Pug to Beethoven the Saint Bernard, dogs in popular culture have always had a way of capturing the public's imagination. Thanks to starring roles in Hollywood movies, their affiliations with certain celebrities, or their images as status symbols, breeds such as Poodles, Dalmatians, Cairn Terriers, Chihuahuas, and Jack Russell Terriers have all done their time as pop culture fads. But for purebred dog breeds, being popular is often not a good thing. For the Tibetan Mastiff in China, it's been a curse.



*Tibetan Mastiff by Shutterstock*

According to a *recent New York Times* article, these huge, majestic canines, which were the must-have dog for status-conscious elites just three years ago, have fallen out of favor due to indiscriminate breeding, large-dog bans in some cities, and fickle, irresponsible owners. But unlike what happens to dogs when canine fads fizzle in Western countries, these majestic giants aren't just being dumped in shelters, they're ending up on dinner plates. In fact, just two months ago, 20 Tibetan Mastiffs were rescued from a dog meat truck, headed for slaughter. All were saved from their terrible fate, with eight of the dogs ending up at Luckier Animal Shelter outside of Beijing.

"Ten years ago, it was German Shepherds, then Golden Retrievers, then Dalmatians and then Huskies," says Mary Peng, founder and chief executive of the International Center for Veterinary Services, in the *NYT* article. "But given the crazy prices we were seeing a few years ago, I never thought I'd see a Tibetan Mastiff on the back of a meat truck."

But before we start singling out China, it's important to remember that breed fads are a worldwide problem, especially in Western countries.

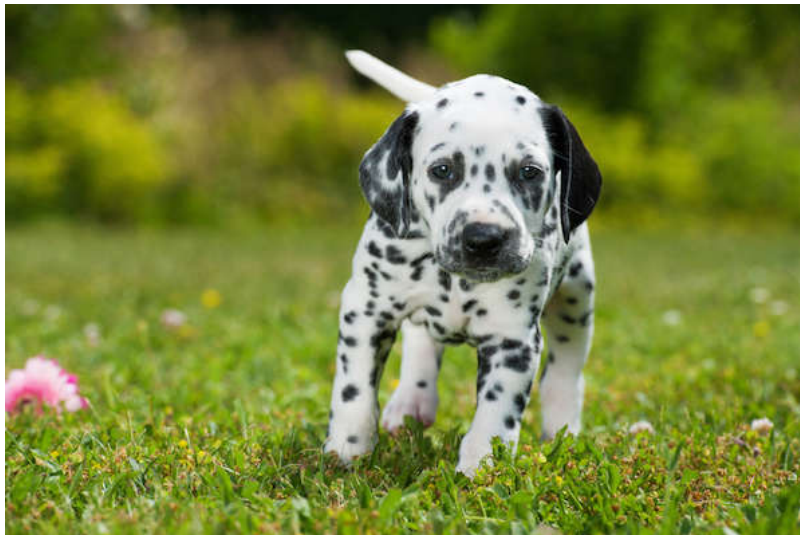


*German Shepherd by Shutterstock*

When people run out en masse and acquire dogs just because they're trendy, the consequences for dogs can be devastating. Fads lead to canine overpopulation and inbreeding, as indiscriminate breeders capitalize on public demand, churning out mass quantities of dogs with little regard for health, temperament, or quality. As a result, many of our most beloved breeds have turned into "genetic nightmares," with the greatest number of inherited disorders compared to less popular dogs.

For example, thanks to Rin Tin Tin's popularity in movies and TV in the mid-20th century, German Shepherds were used by mass-production breeders profiting on the soaring popularity of this intelligent, protective breed. As a result, the GSD we know today is a breed plagued with serious congenital health issues such as hip dysplasia, heart problems, gastric disorders, and cancer.

Besides the genetic destruction of breeds, dog fads are terrible for animal shelters and rescue organizations. Since most impulse shoppers do little or no research before running out and buying a dog who has caught their fancy, it's only a matter of time until they realize that the trendy pup doesn't behave anything like that canine movie star or the furry fashion accessory a pop culture icon carries in her designer handbag. And that's when rescue organizations and animal shelters become flooded with popularized breeds, dumped for not meeting human expectations or simply because they've fallen out of favor in the popular culture.



*Dalmatians surged in popularity after the "101 Dalmatians" movies. Dalmatian by Shutterstock*

Hollywood definitely plays a huge role in this canine crisis. Whenever a movie starring a particular breed of dog is released, U.S. rescues and shelters brace themselves for the deluge of discarded dogs to come.

"When the *101 Dalmatian* movies were released, many animal shelters experienced a huge increase in unwanted Dalmatians," says Susan Feingold, shelter director of Dekalb County Animal Services in Georgia. "Currently, many California animal shelters are overwhelmed with Chihuahuas. In fact, some Chihuahua buyers seem to be purchasing them almost as a fashion accessory. The biggest current fad I'm seeing is with Pit Bulls, which in some communities are seen as a 'macho' status symbol. Any time an animal shelter is overwhelmed with any one breed of dog, it is the dogs who pay the price because it's very difficult to find homes for all of them."

While there are countless rescue groups and shelters working tirelessly to save dogs, fad breeds or otherwise, these valiant organizations simply can't rescue their way out of this problem. Educating people about the responsibility of pet ownership, stressing the importance of doing research before acquiring a certain breed, promoting spay and neuter, and making rescue more attractive than buying are key to stopping the plethora of unwanted dogs overwhelming our shelters and rescues.



*Chihuahua by Shutterstock*

We live in a disposable society, but dogs are not widgets or gizmos, fashion accessories or status symbols — they are living, breathing, sentient beings who depend on humans for their care. By falling prey to trends and giving less thought to acquiring a dog as one would a stereo, people are directly contributing to the needless deaths of one of our world's most loving, loyal creatures — almost 2 million of them per year in the U.S. alone.

Don't be a "sheeple," especially when it comes to dogs. Shelters and rescues are packed to the gills with purebred dogs of all shapes and sizes, so be part of the solution by saving a life and adopting your next canine companion. And if you have your heart set on a certain breed, do your research to make sure it's the right fit for your lifestyle. Dogs are for life, not for a whim or a fashion season.

What do you think of breed fads? Have you ever followed one? What do you think we need to do to combat the negative effects these trends have on dogs?

**About the author:** *Lisa Plummer Savas is a freelance writer, journalist, devoted dog mom, and animal activist. In an effort to help make the world a more compassionate place for non-human species, she is especially focused on using her writing to spread awareness about controversial animal welfare issues, including the dog and cat meat trade in Asia and Africa. She lives in Atlanta with two spoiled German Shepherds, one very entitled Pug, and a very patient, understanding husband. Read more of her work by visiting her blog and website.*