

Old Friends

BY JEN REEDER

Move over puppies—senior dogs have a leg up when it comes to being great companions.

● **Age isn't just** a number at shelters. Sadly, dogs 7 and up are among the last to be adopted, often because people mistakenly believe they won't be as much fun as younger dogs. In honor of Adopt a Senior Pet Month, Laura T. Coffey, author of *My Old Dog: Rescued Pets with Remarkable Second Acts*, shares why you should give mature mutts a new leash on life.

What You See Is What You Get Senior dogs have reached their full size, with an established personality. "You won't have any surprises," Coffey says. Knowing a dog's qualities, like being snuggly or independent, goofy or sassy, will help you find the perfect fit for your family.

You Won't Break the Bank Shelters and nonprofits commonly offer financial incentives. Before anyone "permanently fosters" or adopts a senior dog, organizations like Old Dog Haven in Washington state and Muttville Senior Dog Rescue in the San Francisco Bay Area will cover dental care and veterinary exams, diagnostics, surgeries and vaccinations.

They Can't Be Blamed Sure, some shelter dogs have behavior problems, but many times owners surrender aging dogs because of financial troubles, illness, military deployment, relocation, divorce or other life changes. "Through no fault of their own, pets are

left looking for a new family," Coffey explains.

Perfect for Busy People Older dogs are generally calm, socialized and usually house-trained and spayed or neutered, unlike puppies. According to Coffey, "It's kind of like jumping ahead to the best part of being a pet parent."

It's a Rewarding Experience The compassionate act of helping a senior dog live out its golden years in a loving home is life-changing, says Coffey. "When you go out of your way to help an older dog who has run out of options, you get so much in return: affection, gratitude, unconditional love, and so many happy memories."

To adopt a senior dog, visit greymuzzle.org for established organizations and rescues in the U.S., or search for adoptable senior pets on petfinder.com.

Woof-Worthy Senior Tips

1

Get Them Off the Couch

Older dogs can morph into couch potatoes if you let them, so continue taking them on frequent walks or swims to keep them moving as they age. Ask your veterinarian about mobility exercises for advanced or arthritic dogs.

2

Prevent Injuries

A few adjustments to your living space, such as placing rubber mats under rugs to prevent slipping or moving the dog's bed downstairs, can help prevent a painful fall. Some dogs will also benefit from an orthopedic bed.

3

Keep Them Entertained

Dogs need mental as well as physical exercise, so stimulate their brains with puzzle feeders and interactive games to combat cognitive conditions.



Snap to it!

Check out photographer Sophie Gamand's website (sophiegamand.com) for more adorable photos of rescue animals.