



### **Vizslas vs. Labrador Retrievers: A 10 Point Comparison**

Rhoda Ezell, the co-breeder of my nearly two-year-old Vizsla, Winston, asked me to post about my sense of the differences between Vizslas and Labrador Retrievers.

To back into this, if you ever get a puppy, particularly a Vizsla puppy, please only get one from a responsible breeder like Rhoda and the co-breeder of my V's litter, Pam Williams. If people stop patronizing irresponsible breeders, hopefully this will eventually lead to their extinction. You want all the things in a breeder that Rhoda's downloadable on this group site handout describes. These two ladies have been with and unfailingly available to me since I got Win. I'm fortunate to have Winston and these two ladies standing behind him and routinely answering all my "dumb" questions related to food, training, behavior, grooming, and conformation showing--to name just a few. I've been blessed.

I've owned two Labs, both from 8-9 week old puppies onward, one a chocolate, neutered, one a black, intact, both males. I got my first Lab in 1994 from a back yard breeder outside Houston, Texas. He lived to age 11 when he had to be put down due to cancer. He had to undergo bilateral corrective hip dysplasia surgery as a pup. I did not know what OFA was back then. Now I do. I learned the hard way. My black Lab has been orthopaedically healthy. His parents had OFA cert's with "good" or "excellent" ratings.

I got my second Lab in 2004, so he's 13. He was far better bred by a responsible breeder in the Pittsburgh area. He is still very fit and active--he goes on our 35 minute hike with lots of off-lead

time most every morning, and until recently when he had a seizure, has been a perfectly healthy dog in all respects. He had a bout of Lyme disease but once dx'd was quickly treated.

My experiences are my experiences with just three dogs. I am wary of generalizations and you should be too, but here are MY observations based on MY experiences with these two breeds--YMMV:

1. Both breeds are athletic and outdoorsy, very up for long hikes and runs, every day, twice/day if you're willing. If you're a horse person, I sense Vizslas are more like Thoroughbreds--which can run long distances and still have vast reserves of energy, whereas Labs are more like Quarterhorses-- muscular, strong, but while also highly energetic, do not have the same endurance of Vizslas. Vizslas seem to need more exercise, daily if possible, and for longer, or they have too much banked energy and that's not pleasant to be around. We also go on outings to the country about every weekend so all our dogs can run free for a few hours. It's important for their physical and mental health and mine. I think Vs need as much and probably more exercise than Labs. If they've been properly exercised, Vs can chill out and in fact they're quite good at it.

2. In my experience, both breeds like to swim, although I hear some Vs do not like the water much. My Lab, particularly my black Lab, would wimper and sprint to any body of water and want to be in it. My V is a bit that way now, but not as water crazy as my black Lab was when he was younger. My V now goes to Cape Cod with us and charges into the surf. He is fearless and loves the water. He's an excellent swimmer, webbed paws and all. The key I believe is gentle and smart, not pushy, introduction to the water. Allow opportunities and incentives, but make swimming wholly the dog's choice, not yours.

3. Labs like to be with you. They'll follow you from room to room and lie on the floor next to wherever you are. They like their tummy rubbed. They're nice. Even-tempered. Affectionate. Sweet and lovable. Wonderful companions. Vizslas will also follow you around, and they will lie on the floor by you, but they'd prefer to be ON you, as in, sitting on your lap, being in your face licking your face and ears, sitting on your chest, snuggled next to you in a chair or on a couch, and, if they had their way, sleeping on your bed (we've largely cut out the bed stuff due to resource/territorial issues). Vs like to snuggle up to you, lean against you, feel you, touch you. Labs love to be around you, too. They love to be snuggled and squeezed, but Vizslas seem to thrive on and require more of this type of affection. Both breeds love car trips.

4. Vizslas seem to live half their lives on their hind legs. They like to be where you are, they like to see what's going on, look out windows, look through a storm door window to see where the heck you are and why you haven't let them back in yet. My Lab barks when he wants in. My V prefers to wait patiently, looking through the storm door window while standing on his hind legs, with the expression on his face: "It's about time." Labs seem more content to stay on all fours. I've used all the recommended techniques, but it is very difficult to keep my Vizsla from jumping up and to be honest, if it's just me, I'm sometimes OK with him in my face. So I'm partly to blame for his jumping up. But, I think you are likely to have more work to do to train a V not to jump up.

5. Both breeds are very intelligent and easily trained. They both want to please. I think my V

may have learned some things faster than my Lab, like shaking hands. I taught him that in about 5 minutes. He learned "on" (to get up on and sit on a chair or whatever) one night in puppy kindergarten class. I think Vs are more agile than Labs due to their build. They simply have less mass to lug around. Labs are like Chevy Tahoes with full time four wheel drive. Vizslas are like Toyota 4Runners with 4 WD--lighter, but equally capable off road. Vs are very muscular and strong, surprisingly so for their size. Labs have more meat and fur on them. Vs look like they work out at the gym with weights. They are cut. Both are beautiful dogs.

6. Both breeds are good watchdogs and will bark if they see or hear something they don't like. Both have deep, serious barks. My V, though, goes a few steps further than my Labs have and does not like anyone or anything walking down the street in front of my house. I've learned how to get him to stop barking in the house quickly. My Lab could care less as long as whatever's on the sidewalk is not coming into the house, yet if they did he'd probably think they were a new friend. Although my Labs have known if I'm OK or not with a new person. My V is not as easily convinced a new person is a friend. He's tentative with new people, and I prefer that. It has to be proven to him by ME and then by you that you're not a foe. My V also barks at bicyclists and motorcycles when they get too close to our car or truck when he's riding inside. This can be obnoxious. He's complex that way. Some things, some contraptions, just seem to piss him off and he does not care that these things and contraptions weigh a few hundred or thousand pounds. My V has strong self confidence. My Lab is also very self confident, but he's not as assertive about it as my V. My V also has a strong hunting drive. He'll chase three deer at once. There's no stopping to ponder. He sees or smells them. He's off immediately. He ignores my telling him to stop. They run. He chases. This is hard to stop. This can be scary. He returns a few moments later, most proud of himself. He recalls well, after he's chased off the prey. My Labs never did this. Both my V and Lab are excellent retrievers. They came mostly pre-wired for this, it took minimal training. My V likes to carry things around in his mouth, including his "flag" -- an old towel. He delights in stealing my socks pre-hike as I'm putting on my boots. He returns them unscathed on request. My girlfriend and I call this "pre-wetted" socks. I hide one sock under my butt as I'm putting on the other, but he roots for the hidden one and the harder I laugh the more his tail motorboats and the harder he roots. He loves games. My Labs never engaged in this sort of playful thievery, but they do love to play games with you. My Labs have been gentle with kids. My V as well, but he needs more of an introduction to them before he accepts them.

7. My Vizsla is emotionally complex. My Lab is not; he is far more easygoing. My Vizsla is very sensitive and can get his feelings hurt if you're not careful. My Lab has great empathy, but is not needy except in a thunderstorm. He does not like the rumbling and will put his front paws up on the bed at night to be comforted, which of course I do. That's about the only time he seeks reassurance like that. Whereas, my Vizsla is typically far more attached to me. At the dog show, for example, he'll sometimes lean against me for protection and comfort before we go into the ring. The first Vizsla I met was in a shotgun store. It was a female puppy probably about eight months old. She came over to me in sight of her master, sat next to me, and leaned into and against my legs and looked up at me for a cuddle. I of course obliged and was smitten with the breed. Have been ever since. Vizslas are more soulful in my experience than Labs. Again, both are wonderful dogs, Vs just seem to want to be more wired into their humans than Labs.

8. My Vizsla has food and territory guarded and growled at me. The first time he did this and

growled menacingly at me when I was near his crate (which is his "house" and he loves to go there and stay in there with the door open), I was in shock. I've never had a Lab exhibit any aggression towards me. But, I've heard others say this about their Vs. So, you have to carefully and consistently work with them to get them not to resource guard versus you. I've made a lot of progress with my V in this realm. One thing I do is kid him and tell him "oh yea, you're so tough," and so he's growling at me with his tail wagging happily as he goes in for a tummy rub--kind of like when it rains while the sun's out. So, yea, they're complex. They're not perfect.

9. Labs shed, a lot. They have two coats. Vz shed too, but they only have one thin coat of shorter, finer, hair which is not as visible and does not clump and make fur balls. The vacuum cleaner fills up every week with gobs of Lab hair, not so much V hair.

10. Both breeds have low grooming maintenance requirements. Both will accept baths, but a V bath/hand shower takes five minutes, a Lab 10 minutes due to more hair volume, types and length of hair, and size of the animal. My Lab's fur can get smelly so I bathe him more frequently. My V only smells if he's rolled in something nasty--which he loves to do. My Lab is medium sized, 72 pounds. My V is also medium-sized, but only 52 pounds. My Lab needs his nails trimmed rarely. He wears his nails down on the pavement. My V's nails grow faster and require Dremeling twice a week. Getting him to tolerate this has been a challenge. We finally had to muzzle him and now he's far calmer about the process. But it's a constant chore and you cannot neglect it. So, Labs require less grooming maintenance than Vs, but throw off a lot more hair. I clean both dogs' ears weekly with Epi-Otic. Both tolerate it well. The V needed more coaxing. I brush the V's teeth somewhat regularly. He tolerates it as I use peanut butter-flavored toothpaste. I should have done that with the Lab, but did not get into teeth brushing until recently. Since Vs have only one thin and short coat, if you live where winters are cold, you'll want to get the dog a fleece or other "extra" coat. (See video below.)

So, in summary, both Labrador Retrievers and Vizslas are great dogs, but even though they have appearance similarities, they are completely different animals.

If you are thinking about bringing a Vizsla into your life, make sure you first do your homework and thoroughly learn about Vizslas, before you decide whether, or not, this breed is the right fit for you, your family, and your lifestyle. I recommend you do what I did:

A. Meet a bunch of Vizslas with different owners and in different settings--each time spend an hour or so with the V and their current owner, interacting with their dogs.

B. Talk to lots of people including owners and breeders--ask hard questions.

C. Attend dog shows. See Vizslas and other breeds you are considering.

D. Read serious (not frivolous) articles on the internet and in print. I bought The Versatile Vizsla by Marion Coffman: <http://www.alpinepub.com/versatile-vizsla.html>.

E. Watch lots of videos about the breed. See the way they behave and decide if that is something you want 12-16 years of.

I love both my V and my current Lab, but they're different breeds. A Vizsla is NOT a Labrador Retriever. My experience has been Vizslas require more work and they crave more of your attention.