



**I AM
BELLA,
STAR OF
THE SHOW**

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About Actor Dogs



In France in 1895, during one of the first films ever made, a giant mastiff bound into a scene of workers leaving a factory. The dog was not an actor, but he did unknowingly put himself into film history. Ever since, human's best friend has been finding ways to steal the show.

As filmmaking grew, so did the ways in which dogs were brought into them. People began to train dogs as actors. One of the first doggy stars appeared in 1922. The German shepherd Rin Tin Tin, or "Rinty," had been rescued by an American soldier during World War I. But it wasn't until after the war that the dog became an international celebrity. Starring in twenty-three films, Rin Tin Tin was not only the most famous dog actor of the silent film era, he was one of the most famous actors of any kind!

Eventually, films featured sound and color, and showbiz dogs got even more opportunities to show their stuff. In 1939, a Cairn terrier named Terry got her big break. As Toto, she accompanied Dorothy to the Land of Oz in *The Wizard of Oz*, and became the first doggy star in a movie filmed in color.

Dogs' roles in film continued to grow through the mid-twentieth century. Companies began to specialize in training animal actors. For Chris, a 200-pound Saint Bernard, drooling and shedding was nothing new, but for his role in the 1992 movie *Beethoven*, he also needed to be quick and energetic and perform tricks. Chris was so successful at learning his new skills, a sequel was made with him as the star!

But as dogs were asked to do more and more on set, rules needed to be put in place to help keep them safe. Animal rights groups created guidelines for film companies to follow when working with animal actors. This helped ensure that dogs remained safe on set and could live long and happy lives once they were done acting.

Today, actor dogs' roles continue to change. Computer graphics can be used to keep real dogs out of scenes that might be unsafe. But while technology can now imitate dogs on screen, nothing can replace the personality, unpredictability, and joy they bring to the set.



What It Takes



Unlike many working dogs, actor dogs come in all shapes, sizes, and breeds. But for every showbiz dog, much skill and training is required for each film-worthy performance.

No matter if the part calls for a dog to sit still or do a complex trick, all actor dogs need to be able to follow instructions and have strong self-control. They also need to be comfortable around their fellow human actors and any other animals that may be on set.

Dogs are selected for roles based on their appearance, personality, and skill. Often, more than one dog is cast for a single part. This may be done to highlight different traits or to show a dog growing older over time. Some dogs are brought on as stunt doubles. Other times, a dog might have an understudy—a dog that can step in, in case of emergency.

Dogs of all ages can work as actor dogs, and some act well into old age. Often, actor dogs retire to the homes of their trainers, or with other humans they have worked with whose hearts they have captured.



Actor Dogs in this Book



Jack Russell Terrier

These big-hearted dogs began as fox hunters bred by John “Jack” Russell. Today, their bold nature makes them great actors and delightful companions.

Height: 10–12 inches

Weight: 9–15 pounds

Life Span: 12–14 years

Coat: White with black or tan markings

Known for: Alertness, curiosity



German Shepherd

The German shepherd was first bred to herd sheep in Germany. But the dog’s smarts, speed, and strength have made it a popular choice for many other jobs—from police work to acting—around the world.

Height: 22–26 inches

Weight: 50–90 pounds

Life Span: 7–10 years

Coat: Black and cream or tan

Known for: Confidence, courage

