

LIGHTS, CAMERA, *walkies!*

What gives Lassie her star quality and the Dulux dog its gloss? As *The Dog's Tale* looks at celebrity canines, Adam Sweeting finds out

As well as being your best friend, a brainy and photogenic dog could be your best investment. Nobody appreciates this better than Bob Weatherwax, who owns and trains Lassie, Hollywood's longest-lived canine phenomenon.

He inherited the Lassie business from his father. The current dog, Rudd, is the seventh direct descendant of the original Lassie, who leapt into the movies alongside Elizabeth Taylor in the 1942 blockbuster *Lassie Come Home*.

Fame and Fortune is the second episode of *The Dog's Tale*, BBC2's seven-part series about man's relationship with *Canis familiaris*. It shows the current Lassie catching up on the family history by watching her ancestors' movies. Let's hope she doesn't realise that canny Bob Weatherwax is already training her son, Holly, to step into the spotlight as Lassie number eight.

The Lassie industry has greatly enriched studios, directors and, of course, the Weatherwax dynasty. "Economically, dogs are the best thing to work with," says Bob Weatherwax. "They don't have agents. They don't get residuals." Veteran animal trainer Ann ▶

One boy and his dog: Timmy (Jon Provost) with best friend Lassie, from the original TV series which ran from 1954 to 1971

DOG STARS

Gill Harwood at the Old English Sheepdog Rescue Inn: "The Dulux ad probably sold more puppies than paint," she says



Gary Moyes

Head learned her trade in Hollywood. Having spent seven years working with millionaire canine movie star Benji and his owner Frank Inn, she returned to England and started her own company, Animalation.

"Most of the animal commercials you see are probably mine," she says, a claim you might be inclined to take with a pinch of Chum until you glance at her track record and her trunk-loads of international awards. As well as working in the studio with TV's top "ah-factor" animals, the Andrex puppies, she also found Arthur the Kattomeat cat in an animal shelter and encouraged him to eat cat food off his paw.

Above all, she has Pippin, a mutt-in-a-million who can earn over £1,000-a day. An exotic mix of spaniel, poodle and Lhasa Apso, Pippin is Benji's granddaughter and a sausage-lover extraordinaire, who is adept at scrounging from on-set caterers by holding out a plate and adopting a beseeching expression. "We have to watch her waistline because she's quite likely to go to the back of the queue two or three times," sighs her owner.

Pippin stars with Lynda Bar in the BBC2 children's programme

Come Outside (Thursday 9.45am), and *The Dog's Tale* includes the classic public service commercial made for Spanish TV, in which she packs her bone, dog-bowl and brush in a suitcase and walks out on her young, telly-addicted master. It won Pippin a litter of awards and the Spanish even voted her personality of the year.

Ann Head was given Pippin as a puppy, a birthday present from Frank Inn, but usually you need a sixth sense to find animals who will be right for TV. "I go first and foremost with looks," says Ann. "Out of a litter, I don't go for the one the vet would recommend, which is the bouncy, happy one. I have to go for the most photogenic one and just hope that it will work. It's a case of getting on their wavelength."

Superstar charisma like Pippin's, though, is as rare in animals as it is among Equity members. Ann Head cautions that any old pair of big eyes and a wet nose probably won't be enough. "If somebody wants to put their animals on television they should have them assessed by a professional agent and, just as you would with a child, they should have a set of really good photographs. There's no point owners

saying, 'I've got this beautiful puppy and people keep telling me he ought to be on television,' because until he's trained and at least a year old, we have no way of knowing what he's going to turn out like. You've got to have a nicely behaved little dog."

Inevitably, ads end up persuading viewers to fall in love with the animals as well as the products. Many Old English Sheepdogs, trademarks of the Dulux ads, have found a place round the hearths of the nation, but often not for very long. Indeed, so many end up in need of a new home that Gill Harwood has started the Old English Sheepdog Rescue Inn, in Lincolnshire, to look after them. "The advert probably sold more puppies than paint," she says.

She doesn't blame the advertisers – the Dulux Dog is immaculately cared for, which is why so many people fall for him. "The sort of people who buy a dog because they've seen it on TV would probably make bad owners no matter what they bought," she says. "Unfortunately, there's no breed so difficult to look after as the Old English."

You can give a dog a bad name, but don't give it a bad home. *RT*



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Disney