

2026 EDITION

THE ESSENTIAL BREED GUIDE

# HAVANESE

*THE LITTLE SILK DOG OF CUBA*

HISTORY · STANDARD · TEMPERAMENT · CARE · HEALTH · CHOOSING WELL

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*Ten chapters that move from what the Havanese is to how to live with one. Every fact comes from a source you can check: the official standards, the breed club, or veterinary literature.*


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*This guide is for information only and does not replace advice from your veterinarian.*

# The Havanese passport



NATIONAL DOG
Cuba
FCI NO. 250

BREED NAME

## Havanese

Bichon Havanais · Bichón Habanero · Havaneser

ORIGIN
Cuba, with roots in the bichons of the western Mediterranean

CLASSIFICATION
AKC: Toy Group
FCI: Group 9, Section 1 (bichons)

HEIGHT AT WITHERS
8.5–11.5 in (AKC)
FCI: 23–27 cm (9–10.6 in)

TYPICAL WEIGHT
7–13 lb (3–6 kg)
Typical range, not a standard requirement

LIFE EXPECTANCY
14–16 years

PURPOSE
Companion

COAT
Long (about 5–7 in on adults), soft, straight to wavy; little or no undercoat. Sheds little, but needs frequent brushing.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bond with family | ●●●●● | Grooming needs | ●●●●● |
| With children | ●●●●● | Tendency to bark | ●●●●○ |
| Energy | ●●●○○ | Cold tolerance | ●●○○○ |

*"A small but sturdy dog, cheerful and devoted to its people: it asks for company more than space, and for a brush more than miles."*

Ratings from 1 to 5 based on the sources. Sources: FCI Standard no. 250 (2016); AKC; Havanese Club of America; PetMD; WebMD.

# An exile with a pedigree

## I Luxury goods

The story begins, as so many in the Caribbean do, on a ship. Bichons, cousins of the Maltese and the Bolognese that Mediterranean courts had carried in their arms for centuries, made the perfect gift: small, decorative, and perfectly useless for any kind of work.

According to the FCI, Italian sea captains brought them to Cuba early on. Some chroniclers add that the captains handed them to island merchants to grease the wheels of trade. If so, the Havanese reached the Caribbean like so much else: as a courtesy with an agenda.

## II A dog from a good family

In nineteenth-century Havana it did what any well-connected immigrant does: it settled into the best parlors. It was the dog of the well-to-do, and it is said that it was never sold, only given, which is the polite way of saying not just anyone could have one.

Its tobacco-colored coat, the famous *Havana brown*, gave it a name and, along the way, a questionable birth certificate: the FCI points out, with a certain Belgian chill, that being born in Havana is a legend. By 1860 a French engraving was already billing it as the "little dog of Havana."

## III 1959: an image problem

Then came 1959, and with it a thorough review of who deserved what. A dog whose main credential was sleeping in bourgeois parlors had no great prospects in the new Cuba. Its owners packed their bags, and there was, as everyone knows, little room in those bags. Few dogs made it out. As for the rest, the FCI is blunt: the old bloodlines vanished from the island entirely.



MYTH OR FACT

### Was it born in Havana?

Not exactly. It became Cuban, but its roots are Mediterranean. The name comes from the Havana-brown color of many dogs.

Sources: FCI Standard no. 250; Dogs New Zealand; Showsight Magazine, "Havanese History"; G. Tasker, "The Havanese legacy" (2003).

## IV The lady from Colorado

The rescue came not from Miami, as logic might suggest, but from Colorado. Dorothy Goodale bred Irish Wolfhounds, dogs the size of a pony, and wanted something more manageable. The story goes that, in a dentist's waiting room, leafing through a Spanish-language magazine she couldn't read, she saw a photo of two little white dogs.

What followed was less poetic: ads, phone calls, and patience, until she found Cuban exile families who still had their dogs and, no small detail, their pedigrees. By the mid-1970s she had six: a mother, four of her daughters, and a male from another line. Five more followed. Eleven dogs and the 1963 FCI standard as an instruction manual: with that, she and her husband Bert rebuilt the breed.

## V Rehabilitation

In 1979 they founded the Havanese Club of America. The dogs crossed the sea again, this time to Europe; according to press accounts, some even traveled to the Soviet Union in the luggage of Soviets heading home from Cuba. In 1992 Cuba issued a stamp featuring "Puppy," its first Havanese champion: the bourgeois dog, rehabilitated as national heritage. In 1996 came recognition by the American Kennel Club, and today the Havanese ranks among the 25 most registered breeds in the United States.

The moral is left to the reader. Consider this: the dog the revolution didn't know what to do with is now Cuba's national dog, with much of its family tree written in English.

THE NUMBER

**≈ 11**

founding dogs in the United States. Much of today's population descends from them. Translation: insist on health testing.

LEGEND OR HISTORY

### What's on record and what's told

The generous captains, the dog that was "only given," and the dentist's magazine are stories from breeders and chroniclers. The dates, the standard, and the club are documented facts.

- **1800s** — Parlor dog in Cuba
- **1959** — The revolution
- **1963** — FCI accepts the breed
- **1974** — Goodale's rescue
- **1979** — US breed club founded
- **1996** — AKC recognition
- **2016** — Current FCI standard

Sources: FCI Standard no. 250; AKC, "Havanese History: Bouncing Back from Exile"; Showsight Magazine; Dogsey; Tracey Eaton, "Cuba hounded for rare breed"; G. Tasker, "The Havanese legacy" (2003); Klumb and Baldwin, *The Havanese* (2006).

# Small, sturdy, rectangular

*The AKC calls it a small, sturdy dog of immense charm. The FCI adds: low on the legs, with a long, soft coat and a lively, springy gait.*




**BODY**

Slightly longer than tall, about 4 to 3. Well-sprung ribs.

**HEAD**

Muzzle as long as the skull. Large, almond-shaped eyes, as dark as possible.

**TAIL AND LEGS**

Tail carried high, curled over the back. Ground to elbow no longer than elbow to withers.

Sources: FCI Standard no. 250 (2016); AKC Havanese Breed Standard. The 4:3 proportion is drawn approximately on the illustration; the long coat makes the dog look longer than it is.

# Silk that asks for patience

*The coat is the first thing people fall for and the thing that takes the most time. It sheds little, but loose hair gets trapped and mats if it isn't brushed.*

## Colors

The AKC accepts every color. These are the shades listed by the FCI:

**White**
rarely pure

**Fawn**
in several shades

**Havana brown**
the classic

**Tobacco**
warm brown

**Reddish brown**
mahogany

**Black**
accepted

**Parti-color**
patches of the above

**Tan points**
in all shades

## From puppy to adult



A puppy's coat is shorter and cottony. While it changes into the adult coat, mats form faster than ever: the breed club notes that a puppy may need daily brushing during that stage.

Sources: FCI Standard no. 250 (coat and color); AKC; Havanese Club of America, new owner guide (2025).

# Ten questions before you pay

*A good breeder answers without getting defensive, and will have questions for you too. Check each box once you have the answer.*

- ☐ 01 Can I meet the mother and see where the puppies live?
  *Ideally in the home, not in kennels out back.*
- ☐ 02 Do both parents have a CHIC number or equivalent testing?
  *Ask for registered names so you can verify them.*
- ☐ 03 When was the parents' last eye exam?
  *It should be repeated every year.*
- ☐ 04 Do you do DNA testing?
  *For example, chondrodysplasia and chondrodystrophy.*
- ☐ 05 What health problems have appeared in your lines?
  *Be wary of "none, ever."*
- ☐ 06 How do you socialize the puppies?
  *Noises, people, handling, other dogs.*
- ☐ 07 At what age do puppies go home?
  *Never before 8 weeks.*
- ☐ 08 How many litters a year, and of how many breeds?
- ☐ 09 What does the contract include?
  *Will you take the dog back if I can't keep it?*
- ☐ 10 Will you be available for questions after the sale?



Sources: Havanese Club of America (Health Statement 2020; new owner guide 2025); Vetstreet; DogWellNet.