**STORY:** AMERICA'S TOP DOGS

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**HEADLINE: Which Dogs are Tops In the U.S.?**

Almost 50 million households have at least one dog, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, making the pooch the most popular pet nationwide. But which dog breeds take the top spot when it comes to capturing our hearts? U.S. News & World Report analyzed data from the pet insurance industry to uncover the top dogs in each state, so let's break down what they found.

**Top Dog: The Reign of the Chihuahua**

We asked Dr. Kelly Cairns, VP of Medical Excellence & Education for Thrive Pet Healthcare, to review the report. "The most popular dog in 21 states according to this report is the Chihuahua," she says. One of the reasons might be because of its size. "The Chihuahua is a small dog, which I think becomes easier to embrace into your household related to the space you might have in your home, or if you live in an urban area or if you might be renting, where potentially a clause in that lease might be that you can only have a smaller dog."

But Dr. Cairns says the tiny but mighty Chihuahua also has some other top-notch qualities that make it stand out. "Those of us that love Chihuahuas can tell you, there's lots of delightful things about this breed. They're very smart dogs. They tend to be very easy to train. They're very loyal to their owners. They give a lot of love and they're very protective, so they're just delightful dogs," she says.

**The French Bulldog Phenomenon**

According to the report, the French Bulldog struts into second place, winning the hearts of pet parents in California, Florida, and Hawaii, among other states. "They are a small breed, which is again conducive to small spaces and urban settings," she says. "They have a delightful face with a specific ear shape that is often considered very lovable."

**Golden Retrievers and German Shepherds: A Tale of Two Breeds**

Taking the bronze in the popularity contest is the ever-loyal Golden Retriever. Known for their laid-back demeanor, striking appearance, and family-friendly nature, Golden Retrievers continue to capture the hearts of Americans.

"The Golden Retriever is probably, for a lot of us, the poster child for that fluffy, lovable, large breed family dog," says Dr. Cairns. "They're laidback, often easygoing. They're fun for folks who want to be outside with their dog, doing a lot of activity. They're just a no-brainer choice. So it really didn't surprise me that they were number three on the list."

Meanwhile, German Shepherds make a formidable fourth-place finish, celebrated for their intelligence, loyalty, and versatility. From police work to family companionship, German Shepherds prove their worth as one of America's most beloved breeds. Dr. Cairns explains, "When you're in with the German Shepherd, you're in. So they're fiercely protective dogs to their families and those they love, and once their family says, 'You can relax right now,' they're going to chill out on the couch and watch that football game with you."

**Decoding the Doodles and Shihtzus**

The Goldendoodle makes a splash as a hybrid breed, combining the best of Golden Retrievers and Poodles. Their moderate size, charming appearance, and hypoallergenic coat appeal to families seeking a cuddly companion without the shedding. "The combination of these two breeds results in a moderate-sized dog that has a characteristic hair coat and is very pleasing to look at," says Dr. Cairns. "They tend to be a breed that is a little bit more resistant to shedding and dander, which can make them a better choice in a household that may have a human being with a pet allergy to dander. In other words, they can be a little more hypoallergenic, which may also play into why they're so popular in some households."

Meanwhile, the Shih Tzu charms its way into the hearts of pet lovers with its small stature, gentle nature, and suitability for various living environments. "The Shih Tzu tends to be pretty gentle. They're fun-loving and they enjoy spending time with their humans," but she goes on to say, "They can be a dog that may be a little more likely to be anxious, and it's really important that you're socializing your Shih Tzu from a young age so that they're not as anxious when they're in new situations or exposed to new people."

**Choosing Your Canine Companion**

Dr. Cairns emphasizes the importance of informed decision-making when selecting a furry friend. By considering factors such as breed characteristics, lifestyle compatibility, and training needs, prospective pet parents can ensure a harmonious relationship with their new canine companion.

"Knowledge is power here," she says. "There are some great websites out there where you can read about different dog breeds and the relative overall characteristics of those breeds, as well as the relative potential risk of different health conditions that different breeds may have, as well as what each breed needs."

Consulting with a veterinarian early on can provide invaluable guidance on training and care, setting the stage for a lifetime of tail-wagging adventures. "I recommend that you get in to see your veterinarian as soon as you bring that new family member into your house," suggests Dr. Cairns. "Have a conversation not only about what needs to be done in terms of proactive wellness but also about training for that pet. Because you can set up a strong foundation through training early on that's going to ensure that pet is a good fit in your household regardless of the breed."

America's diverse canine landscape reflects the unique preferences and lifestyles of its pet-loving population. Whether you're drawn to pint-sized Chihuahuas, regal German Shepherds, or cuddly Goldendoodles, there's a furry friend for every family. So, leash up, embark on your journey, and let the pawsome adventures begin!