

## Dr. Nancy Kay, DVM, DACVIM

Nancy has more than 30 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a board-certified veterinary specialist in internal medicine as well as a valued member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team since 2014.

A [Belgian Malinois](#) named Jagger plays the title role in the recently released movie, *Max*<sup>1</sup>. Previews indicate, the canine character Max has served in Afghanistan, and is returned to the United States after his Marine handler/partner is killed in action. Max, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, becomes part of a coming of age story for the Marine's younger brother.

Max is pegged to be a summer blockbuster, although the reviews I've read have been mixed. Regardless of its popularity, Max will undoubtedly create an, "I must have a [Belgian Malinois](#) phenomenon." Whenever Hollywood unleashes a new dog-starring movie, a "[breed](#) du jour" is created. This phenomenon appears to be an ingrained, cultural dynamic, no different than other fads gleaned from the movies such as clothing fashions, hairstyles and even baby names.

### Do movies really influence popular breeds?

Three researchers from the [University of Bristol](#), the [City University of New York](#), and [Western Carolina University](#) recently conducted a study titled, "Dog Movie Stars and Dog Breed Popularity: A Case Study in Media Influence on Choice." They looked at 87 movies released between 1927 and 2004, all of which featured dogs. By evaluating [American Kennel Club \(AKC\)](#) registration trends, the researchers confirmed that movies do indeed have a lasting impact on breed popularity, in some cases, for up to ten years<sup>2</sup>.

### Concerns from the Belgian Malinois community

In response to the release of *Max*, Judy Hagen, President of the the [American Belgian Malinois Club \(ABMC\)](#), is quoted on [StreetInsider.com as saying](#), "We are very concerned that the public will see this movie and recognize the intelligence, athleticism and beauty of the Belgian Malinois, but not realize that the [dogs](#) currently being featured in movies and television are the result of years of intense training. Living with a Malinois requires a commitment to daily [training](#) and

[exercise](#). Without this they will find their own activities that will make your life a nightmare of dangerous and destructive [behaviors](#)."

Another ABMC member, Melinda Wichmann stated, "Dedicated Malinois guardians joke that Malinois are not just a dog, they're a lifestyle. Unless you are ready to be a firm leader 24/7/365, Malinois will assume that you are an idiot and that they are in charge<sup>3</sup>."

The Belgian Malinois rescue community is already bracing for the predicted influx of dogs. Taylor Updike Haywood, Midwest Coordinator for [American Belgian Malinois Rescue](#), reported, "It's already starting here. People are calling and asking to adopt the Air Jordan of dogs." It so happens that a movie trailer for *Max* uses<sup>3</sup> the phrase, "Air Jordan of dogs" to describe the breed<sup>3</sup>.

The likely increase in the number of Malinois relinquished to rescue organizations is a valid concern. An impulse purchase of a Malinois, without consideration of the breed's temperament (they are ideal for police and military work) and all that is necessary to successfully train and care for one is bound to produce an unhappy ending. Additionally, unethical breeders taking advantage of the movie-generated demand for Malinois will produce pups without consideration paid to creating good health and temperaments. Yet one more ingredient in a recipe for disaster.

### Max and me

I confess to having mixed feelings about seeing *Max*. I would love to watch it because three of the scenes in this movie were filmed in my very own backyard, [DuPont State Recreational Forest](#). As tempting as this is, there will be no *Max* for me. I will resist for the following reasons:

- I'm a major wimp when it comes to seeing animals or young children suffer, even when I know there will be a happy ending.
- I get tweaked when animal-related things, such as their behaviors, are inaccurately portrayed in the movies. And, this seems inevitable in Hollywood productions. (Don't even get me started about how veterinarians or scenes of veterinary care are cinematically depicted.)
- Most importantly, I don't want to contribute to

the box office success of Max. The fewer tickets sold, hopefully the fewer impulse purchases of Belgian Malinois.

### Impulse adoptions

Purchasing a particular breed of dog based on a reaction to a movie is ill advised. Such an impulse adoption foregoes the important research and preparation necessary to ensure that the dog breed will be a good fit. Think about it, how likely will a Belgian Malinois, the canine king of police and military work, be a suitable pet for the average family?

I encourage you to share this article with the Max moviegoers you know. Together, we can discourage as many of people as possible from thinking they need a Belgian Malinois, unless they are ready to care for one.

[To learn more about the Belgian Malinois click here.](#)

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*

### Resources:

1. Max. Dir. Boaz Yakin. Perf. Thomas Haden Church, Josh Wiggins. Warner Bros., 2015.
2. [Acerbi, Alberto, and Harold Herzog. "Dog Movie Stars and Dog Breed Popularity: A Case Study in Media Influence on Choice." PLOS ONE: N.p., 10 Sept. 10. Web. 06 July 2015.](#)
3. ["Impact of Movies on Dog Breed Popularity." ScienceDaily. University of Bristol, 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 06 July 2015.](#)