FEATURED ON:

THE WEEK

WELL-HEELED: SIX-FIGURE GUARD DOGS ARE THE NEW SECURITY SYSTEM FOR THE WEALTHY

Many of these dogs can cost upwards of $150,000
One company describes their guard dogs as the 'ultimate lovers and protectors'
(Image credit: Illustration by Julia Wytrazek / Getty Images)

The lifestyles of the rich and famous are ever-evolving, and many of these individuals are now purchasing guard dogs as a new way to keep themselves safe. While theconcept of a guard dog is not exactly new, these animals are closer to investments in security — many of the top-line pooches sell for upwards of $150,000.

From Hollywood enclaves that help train these animals to an elite guard dog training facility in Montana, those with the financial means are increasingly looking to these dogs as a modern form of protection and insurance. How are these dogs trained, and what makes their price tag so high?

WHAT TYPES OF PLACES SELL HIGH-END GUARD DOGS?

Various companies sell different versions of high-end guard dogs, many of which breed the dogs for protection. One such breeder is Svalinn, whose website describes its dogs as the "ultimate lovers and protectors" that offer "guaranteed peace of mind." Svalinn, like many guard dog breeders, does not place dogs with owners often. The company "sells no more than 20 dogs a year and only about 350 exist around the world," said New York magazine. Svalinn's dogs "cost at least $150,000," and each dog is an "undisclosed mix of Dutch shepherd, German shepherd and Belgian Malinois." Much of this price is "derived not from breeding but rather the intensity of its training, which takes two to three years." The company is positioned as a "full concierge service," Svalinn's founder, Kim Greene, said to the outlet.

While Svalinn is based in Montana, other guard dog companies take advantage of large urban areas. In Los Angeles, where crime remains widespread, guard dogs "have become highly sought after among the rich, many of whom worry about being targeted," said the Los Angeles Times. Companies like Delta K9 Academy in North Hollywood put their dogs through a "rigorous training program," and they are "marketed under names such as 'personal canine bodyguards' and 'executive protection dogs.'"

Arteom Bulgadarian, who purchased a home in Sherman Oaks, bought a dog from Delta K9 for $70,000. But "amortize [the cost] over 10 to 15 years, whatever the dog's life is, and it's not that big of a price tag," Bulgadarian said to the Times.

WHAT CAN THESE DOGS DO?

The dogs go through a wide range of training. In the case of Svalinn, a "four-step process involves meeting the breeders and getting to know the dogs, visiting the ranch and selecting the perfect animal before securing the animal with a non-refundable deposit," said The Independent. This is because they are trying to train the dogs to become "beasts that could rip out an attacker's trachea yet also function as pets," said
New York magazine.

In terms of specifics the dogs learn, they are taught with a "focus on foundational obedience, stability, agility, socialization and of course, protection, [so] each dog is honed to meet the unique needs" of its owner, according to Svalinn's website. The training is then specifically tailored "according to your particular living situation, specific needs, daily routine and potential security threats."

High-end guard dogs go through intense training early in their lives so that "by three to four months old, you will have a puppy that is confident and has a strong personality," Mike Israeli, the owner of Delta K9 Academy, said to Business Insider. At that point, trainers "start teaching them commands." By the end of the training process, the dog "understands that if there is no command, it won't engage, but if there is a command to go, it will go." This is not always easy, as it is "very difficult to bring the animal to the level where they understand, 'Even though I've been taught how to fight and how to bite, sometimes I'm not allowed to make that decision if there is no command.'"