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Dog

Show

Maria Menounos' pooches make life entertaining

By Melanie D.G. Kaplan, WebMD Contributing Writer



It's slight consolation to us mere mortals to know that entertainment superstar Maria Menounos hasn't always had her act together. In fact, she freely admits she used to be a slob.

"After I moved to L.A., my boyfriend took it upon himself to clean out my desk, and he found ancient to-do lists" that never got done, she says. "He was genuinely sad. He said, 'It was such a mess! You poor thing, I don't know how you were living like that.'"

But thanks to her uber-organized man, writer and producer Keven Undergaro, Menounos now counts herself among the orderly. She says that's what has given her the time and peace of mind to fit so many fulfilling things into her life—including picking up stray pups on the streets of Los Angeles.

Today, the 34-year-old host of the TV entertainment news series *Extra* is so organized that nearly everything in her house—with the exception of her four rescue dogs and Undergaro—is neatly labeled. All of her dogs are white, but she quickly points out that she doesn't have a "white fetish."

"That's just a coincidence," Menounos laughs. "They all just came to me." Baby and Benjamin are bichons, Apollo (who was thrown from a moving car before he was rescued) is a German shepherd, and Athena (who was in a puppy mill) is a poodle.

"Benjamin has so many expressions, he's like a little person," she says. "And when Apollo gets jealous, he does this"—Menounos makes a high-pitched wailing sound. "But generally, he's the happiest dog you

will ever meet in your life—and he's a hero because he rescued the bichons from the pool." She says Athena is the "most soulful, appreciative lover on the planet." And Baby? "She's just like me—independent and very much a tomboy, but needs her hugs. She just loves to play. And be happy."

Born to Greek immigrants, Menounos developed a strong work ethic at an early age, helping her parents clean nightclubs in Boston. She studied broadcast journalism and film in college, and at 23, she became the youngest person ever to host CBS's *Entertainment Tonight*. She also holds the distinction of having conducted the only TV interview with the entire Obama family. She played herself in the film *Tropic Thunder*, starred in *Kickin' It Old Skool*, and did voice work for a James Bond video game. She's appeared on NBC's *Scrubs*, CBS's *Without a Trace*, HBO's *Entourage*, and The CW's *One Tree Hill*.

Most recently, Menounos and partner Derek Hough nearly made it to the season finale of *Dancing With the Stars* on ABC. "It was the most wonderful experience of my

life, hands down," she says. "Learning how to dance was something I'd always wanted to do. So with this show, I got to have my little-girl dance recital, with my costumes and fringe and glitter—and my parents sitting in the front row."

Menounos created the nonprofit Take Action Hollywood! (takeactionhollywood.com), which helps raise awareness for causes ranging from type 2 diabetes and autism to the environment and pet adoption. She also serves as a diabetes awareness ambassador for the Entertainment Industry Foundation.

On top of all that (and a dog allergy), Menounos manages to rove the city, looking for strays. She used to volunteer at the Glendale Humane Society, but now she just keeps water bowls, treats, and leashes in the trunk of her car. "I realized I needed something to catch these dogs when they were running," she says. "I'm usually lucky and figure out where they come from. Some have tags, but often, I've just had this crazy intuition and find the house where they belong. It's so sad to see them wandering."

As for Menounos' next big thing, there are a few "secret" projects she can't yet talk about. But no matter what's in the stars for this star, we can be sure she'll be on top of her to-do list. ■

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LEFT AND ABOVE: BLEACHER + EVERARD PHOTOGRAPHY

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