

The breed of the month is...

Australian Shepherd



Breed History

While there are many theories as to the origin of the Australian Shepherd, the breed as we know it today developed exclusively in the United States. The Australian Shepherd was given its name because of their association with the Basque shepherders who came to the United States from Australia in the 1800's. The Aussie rose rapidly in popularity with the boom of western riding after World War II, becoming known to the general public via rodeos, horse shows, movies and television. Their inherent versatility and trainability made them useful on American farms and ranches. The American stockmen continued the development of the breed, maintaining the versatility, keen intelligence, strong herding instinct and eye-catching appearance.



Australian Shepherds have been registered by various registries since the early 1950's. In 1990, the United States Australian Shepherd Association was established as the parent club of the Australian Shepherd representing the breed to the American Kennel Club. On September 1, 1991, the AKC recognized the Australian Shepherd breed and on January 1, 1993, accepted them into the Herding Group.

Temperament

The Australian Shepherd is an intelligent, medium-sized dog of strong herding and guardian instincts. They are also delightful and loyal companions and great family dogs. They love to be part of the daily hustle and bustle, and enjoy riding in the vehicle just to be with their beloved master. As farm dogs, they diligently carry out their responsibilities, be it bringing in the stock or finding the stray one that got tangled in the brush. They are easily trained, easily housebroken, because they are intelligent and eager to please.

Aussies have been used as seeing-eye dogs, as utility dogs to the physically handicapped, hearing aid dogs, police and narcotics dogs, and search and rescue dogs. In the northern areas they have also been used as sled dogs. Many go with their masters as volunteers to children's homes and nursing homes to do therapy work. Truly, the Australian Shepherd is a highly versatile dog.



“Aussies” (as they are lovingly nicknamed) are very active dogs that need a great deal of exercise on a daily basis to prevent them from becoming bored or frustrated and consequently developing destructive habits. Because of their high energy level, combined with high intelligence, Aussies need to be given a "job" to perform, be it shepherding the children, protecting the house, herding livestock or competing in dog events.



One of the most frequent reasons Aussies get turned over to rescue groups is that their owners didn't anticipate how energetic these dogs are and weren't willing or able to constructively channel that energy through training. Aussies want to be with their owners all the time, which is why they insist on following their owners from room to room in the house, and love nothing better than going along in the car or truck on errands. They can be highly territorial and protective of their masters' possessions, potentially causing serious difficulties unless this behavior is controlled with proper training.

Appearance

The Australian Shepherd comes in four acceptable colors:

- * black
- * blue merle - a marbling of gray/silver and black, often creating a “blue” effect
- * red - ranging from light cinnamon to liver
- * red merle – a marbling of red and silver or buff

A variety of white and tan markings may appear on the face, chest, front and rear legs. The outer coat is of moderate length, with a texture that is straight to wavy and weather resistant. The undercoat is soft and dense, and the amount varies with climate. Tails are either naturally bobbed or docked. Ears are moderately sized, and should break forward and over, or fall to the side as rose ears. Males weigh approximately 50 to 65 pounds, measuring from 20 to 23 inches, and females weigh about 40 to 55 pounds, measuring from 18 to 21 inches.



The eyes of the Australian Shepherd come in a wide variety of colors, making this one of the most notable features of the breed. They may be any color or combination of colors from glassy blue, amber, hazel, to all shades of brown. As a result Aussies can be encountered that have, for example, a blue eye and a brown eye. With the merles, it is not uncommon to see both eyes “marbled” with two different colors.