

The Bernese Mountain Dog



History

The Bernese Mountain Dog comes from Switzerland and is one of four tri-colored varieties of Swiss mountain dogs, which also include the Appenzeller Sennenhund, the Entlebucher Sennenhund and the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. The long coat of the Bernese Mountain Dog distinguishes it from its close relatives. It was bred to be a draft dog (also known as a cart dog), a watchdog and an all-around farm dog. It is thought to have descended centuries ago from crosses between mastiff-type dogs and native flock-guarding dogs in the valleys of the Swiss Alps, before becoming popular with modern breed fanciers. One of its main historical tasks was to transport fresh milk, cheese and other produce for small farmers who were too poor or otherwise unable to own draft horses to pull carts containing their wares.



Until the late nineteenth century, due to a lack of concerted breeding efforts, this breed was all but forgotten except by rural inhabitants of the Berne area of Switzerland. Starting in 1892, a Swiss innkeeper, and shortly thereafter a college professor from Zurich, scoured the countryside in an attempt to find good specimens of the breed. After much searching, they finally were able to find quality dogs, thus starting the rehabilitation of the breed. A breed specialty club was founded in Switzerland in 1907, and the Bernese Mountain Dog thereafter became sought after as show dogs and companions, in addition to continuing their working roles as “beasts of burden” on market days.

The breed was first brought to the United States in 1926 and achieved recognition by the American Kennel Club in 1937. The parent club was formed in 1968 (the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America) and became an AKC member club in 1981.

Personality

Bernese Mountain Dogs are a true family companion. They are sweet, affectionate and easy-going, take well to children and are extremely patient with kids climbing all over them. They have the energy to play all day, and will



happily flop down by the fireplace for a little rest and relaxation with the rest of the family. They do just fine with other pets, are polite to strangers and sometimes think they are lapdogs, despite their size.

Behavior Traits

The natural shyness of this breed can lead to anxiety problems in adolescence and adulthood. Bernese puppies should be socialized to accept new people and new situations as joyous events, rather than things to be feared.

Separation Anxiety can be common in this breed. They enjoy spending time with people, and if left alone for long periods of time without proper exercise and activity, destructive tendencies can develop.

Appearance

Bernese Mountain Dogs are sturdy, strong dogs with compact bodies and deep, wide chests. Their broad heads have a furrow down the middle and their ears are triangular and pendant. Berners' eyes are dark and expressive. They have long bushy tails which usually hang low, unless the dog is excited. Their distinctive coats are tricolored, thick and wavy. Females are slightly smaller than males, and you can often tell the sex of the dog by their appearance – males Berners have a distinctly masculine air while females have a softer, more feminine air. Both sexes, however, are extremely strong and powerful.



Size and Weight

Bernese Mountain Dogs are large, with males standing between 25 and 27.5 inches at the shoulder and females standing between 23 and 26 inches. They weigh between 70 and 115 pounds at maturity.

Coat and Color

Bernese Mountain Dogs are known for their beautiful coats. Their double coat is wooly on the underside and with a long, wavy topcoat. When well-groomed, people can't resist running their fingers through the dog's coat. Berners are most commonly tricolored with black hair covering most of the body accented with rich rust colors over the eyes, on the legs and the underside of the tail. The bright white markings appear at the chest, between the eyes and at the tail tip. The chest marking usually resembles an inverted Swiss cross.

Grooming Needs



Berners shed year round, with the heaviest shedding coming during the changes in season. Brushing at least once a week – more in spring and fall – will help keep the coat neat and will reduce the amount of hair that hits the floor or furniture. Depending on the dog's activity level and desire to romp in the dirt, they only require a bath once every couple of months.

Their ears can trap bacteria, dirt, and liquid so weekly cleaning with a veterinarian-recommended cleanser can help prevent painful ear infections. Weekly brushing of the teeth is also recommended to reduce tartar and bad breath. Active Berners will naturally wear their toenails down to a good length,



but some do not. The general rule is if the dog's nails click on a hard floor, they are too long. Monthly trimming may be required.

Health

The average life span of the Bernese Mountain Dog is between 8 and 11 years. Breed health concerns may include arthritis, autoimmune disease, bloat (gastric dilatation and volvulus), cancer, hip and elbow dysplasia, kidney disease, entropion, cataracts and generalized progressive retinal atrophy. Their long coat requires regular brushing to reduce shedding, prevent matting and remove dirt and dander.

Activity Requirements

Bernese Mountain Dogs enjoy naps and relaxation just as much as the next dog, but they do require a lot of activity. They are a winter dog – their long coats aren't designed for long, hot summers – and they will enjoy romping in the snow, and if possible, pulling children around on a sled. They are not apartment dogs; they need lots of room and a yard to wander in. They will enjoy taking evening walks with the family, and will proudly trot alongside mother and baby stroller.

Socialization is very important with a Bernese, and it should begin as early as possible. They can be shy around new people and if they don't learn to accept strangers and new situations, they can become overly timid and anxious.

Trainability

A confident, consistent, but gentle hand is needed with this breed. Though some males can be dominant, overall this breed is docile and should never be treated harshly. They respond best to lots of reinforcement and a few treats. They can be stubborn and slow to learn, so patience and an even keel temperament are important for anyone training a Bernese Mountain Dog. Despite their initial stubbornness, they do well in basic obedience training and can be graduated to advanced tricks and agility.

