

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG

Those who are considering sharing a significant portion of their lives with a German Shepherd Dog will do well to discount the associations, good or bad, that have become attached to the dog throughout its intricate history and to concentrate upon the qualities and characteristics that first attracted von Stephanitz to the animal. The original and, in this case, ideal German Shepherd

HOW BIG SHOULD THE SHEPHERD BE?

Originally intended for herding, German Shepherd Dogs were medium-sized, but as guarding and other uses became predominant, the breed became progressively larger. Today adult males are 24–26 inches at the withers and females are approximately 2 inches smaller. The normal weight range is 66–88 lbs. Adult physical characteristics are achieved by 10–18 months, but dogs will typically fill out until three years of age. Large size is not necessarily preferred and may, in some cases, exacerbate the tendency to certain orthopedic disorders.



Counted among the most trainable of all pure-bred dogs, the German Shepherd excels in numerous forums of service and competition.

Dog was agile, powerful, rugged, steady, alert and intelligent. Above all, the dog delighted in work and purpose. This dog's association with man was neither servile nor amusing, nor was the dog ever intended to be an object of beauty. The German Shepherd Dog began on a footing as equal to man as a canine ever achieved.

Such nobility of purpose perhaps cannot be sustained in the ordinary households that will be home to the vast majority of German Shepherd Dogs, but the ideal should neither be forgotten nor ignored. Expect that you and your German Shepherd Dog will be equal on some intrinsic level and your relationship will be well founded.

The all-weather coat of the German Shepherd does not require much time from his owner. This handsome dog has a fairly short coat.



PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Puppies have floppy ears that stand erect by six or seven months of age. Some dogs have ears that never stand. Although taping most often can correct this fault, these dogs should be considered poor choices for breeding.

Conventional depictions of the breed emphasize the black and tan coloring with saddleback markings, but the German Shepherd Dog comes in a wide variety of colors such as black and red, black and cream, all black, all white, sable (with various colorations), black and silver, liver and blue. Breeders do not favor the white, liver or blue varieties; the AKC lists white dogs among the disqualifications.

Coats are double, with the coarser outer coat serving to resist water and debris, and the soft dense undercoat working to retain body heat during cold seasons. The fur can range from short and coarse to long and soft. Long-coated dogs, however, are not eligible for showing in the breed ring.

German Shepherd Dogs will shed all year long, with heavy shedding during the spring and fall. Grooming, however, is not difficult. Regular light brushing is all that is required. Bathing, when necessary, should employ a hypoallergenic shampoo.

The main concern of every admirer of the German Shepherd Dog, however, is character. The animal should be courageous,

intelligent, playful and safe with children and obedient and responsive to his owner. These elements of sound disposition and utility supersede any and all physical ideals.

PERSONALITY

Throughout history, in whatever capacity the German Shepherd has been used, one thing that has been constant is the bond that has developed between the dogs and their owners. Since the dogs have traditionally been used as service and working dogs, this bond was a necessity. The dogs had to be very obedient and very reliable to perform their given tasks. Since a major role of the German Shepherd has been that of a guard dog, the dogs also had to be very protective of their owners. These characteristics translate into a pet dog that is very intelligent, highly trainable and extremely loyal. The pet German Shepherd watches over the entire family and seems

BEHAVIOR & PERSONALITY

The behavior and personality of your German Shepherd Dog will reflect your care and training more than any other breed characteristics.

Remember that these dogs require a purposeful existence, so plan your relationship around activities that serve this most basic and important need. All the good potential of the breed will naturally follow.



German Shepherd Dogs were originally bred to be sheep-herders and thus are naturally active dogs.



to be able to sense if someone is in trouble or needs help. Likewise, the German Shepherd is a wonderful protector of children and of his owner's property.

Due to these protective instincts, the German Shepherd is naturally wary of strangers. This is not to say that he is not a friendly dog, but he chooses whom to befriend based on his owner's attitude. "Any friend of yours is a friend of mine," the German Shepherd seems to say to his owner, and he fiercely trusts his owner's judgment. The dog will warm up to people that he becomes familiar with; he looks to his owner for clues about who is okay and who is not. Proper socialization and introduction to people from an early age are necessary to help the German Shepherd become more accepting of the people he meets.

The German Shepherd is noble and proud—he has a lot going for him and he knows it! A wonderful combination of stamina, athleticism, intelligence, grace and beauty, he personifies the virtues of "man's best friend."

OWNER SUITABILITY

Because the German Shepherd Dog is so devoted to his owner, it is only natural that he should thrive best with an owner who can show him equal devotion. The German Shepherd basks in his owner's attention. It is not necessarily true that the only type of person suitable to own a German Shepherd is one who is home all day, but the owner who spends the day at work must plan on time with the dog upon his return home.

Exercise is also a consideration for the German Shepherd. Remember, these dogs were bred to work and to be active. The breeders' original focus was on function. Since the pet dog is not being used for his intended purpose, he must be active in other ways. A German Shepherd who lives at home with his owner cannot exercise himself; it is something that both dog and owner need to participate in. It is not fair to the dog, who has patiently waited all day for his owner to return from work, for the owner to come home and promptly park himself on the couch for the remainder of the evening. Exercise is essential for the German Shepherd's well-being, both physically and mentally. It provides this athletic breed with much-needed activity, plus it helps him feel like he has a purpose.



Zwinger von Muldental and his young friend keep watch over the property.

A house with a securely fenced-in yard is ideal for a German Shepherd owner, as the dog will have some freedom to run and play by himself. The dog should still be under the owner's supervision when off-leash, but at least the dog will not be totally dependent on his owner for exercise. This does not make up for time spent with his owner, but will at least give the dog some physical benefits. An owner who keeps a German Shepherd in a house without a yard or in an apartment must make the commitment to regular runs/walks/playtime with the dog.

The German Shepherd will fit into just about any family structure...adults, children, single people, etc. It is just necessary

that the breed's characteristics are taken into consideration.

VERSATILITY AND AGILITY

Although your German Shepherd Dog may never be required to do more than provide companionship and protection to you and your family, you should be proud to consider the many functions that the breed can be called upon to perform.

MILITARY DOGS

German Shepherd Dogs have been used as military dogs since World War I. Their roles have been numerous. The dogs served as sentries, guards, mine detectors, rescuers of wounded soldiers and carriers of food and medicine.

The German Shepherd Dog's working ability and trainability have earned him the distinction of being the most recognizable service dog in the world. This guide dog is being trained at the Seeing Eye® facility.

The instinct to serve, which is born in the animal, is the foundation of his functional versatility along with his physical and mental traits of strength, size, endurance and intelligence. It would be fair to say that the majority of all service dogs in the world are German Shepherd Dogs. The potential for specific service duties lies within each German Shepherd Dog, but professional training is required to actualize it in almost every case.

As previously noted, the German Shepherd Dog is an excellent herding dog. This was his original function and remains a central factor in his modern versatility. The dog's endurance, his rough-coated imperviousness to weather, his sure-footed speed, responsiveness and his deep-rooted instinct to protect anything small or weak make him an ideal herding choice.

German Shepherds have been the Seeing Eye® dog of choice for generations since the first association was formed in 1929.



It is only in Germany, however, that the German Shepherd Dog is a first choice among farmers and stock owners. In the United States and Great Britain, other native breeds, more traditional and therefore more attractive to some, like the Australian Shepherd and the Border Collie, are predominantly seen in herding capacities.

German Shepherd Dogs were especially impressive as scout dogs, often able to detect the presence of an enemy at 100 yards away. Countless human lives were saved by these dogs but many of the animals were sacrificed in services like mine detection.

From these military uses developed the breed's important

role as police dogs. In the pursuit and apprehension of criminals, the breed has proven itself valuable and rather more effective, certainly more humane, than guns. The dog's cool nerves and intelligence make him an excellent choice for crowd control. His scenting ability makes him invaluable in search-and-rescue work, as well as bomb and drug detection.

The skills and abilities of these functions are combined in *Schutzhund*, a training and competition program that emphasizes the elements of protection. *Schutzhund* means "protection dog" in German. *Schutzhund* trials have existed since the early 1900s. They include tests for temperament, tracking and protection. Dogs are scored according to their performance in these areas and must exhibit complete obedience (despite distraction), confidence, courage, scenting ability, determination and concentration in tracking.

The preceding roles have stressed obedience founded upon the breed's natural proclivities.

SCHUTZHUND DOGS

In *Schutzhund* trials, dogs are rated by performance and can earn the titles of SchH. I (beginner), SchH. II (intermediate) and SchH. III (master). These titles can be appended to the dog's name and pedigree.



Excelling in police work, the German Shepherd Dog has earned the highest accolades. Winning Police Dog Action is Overhills Foggarty, bred by Meg Purnell-Carpenter and handled by WPC Leigh White.

The German Shepherd Dog is not a particularly aggressive dog. He is, however, very protective of his family and property. This is the basis of the alertness and protective instinct that have made him a staple in institutional use and an effective watchdog for the home and family.

The most noble and pride-provoking use of the German Shepherd Dog has been in the service of people with physical challenges. The German Shepherd Dog was the first dog used as a guide dog for blind individuals and later for deaf individuals. The

If you are seeking a top-rate protection dog, then select a puppy from proven stock. Both of these police dogs were bred by Meg Purnell-Carpenter.



dog's initial employment as guides for blind World War I veterans led to the creation of the Seeing Eye® Foundation in 1929. Today this breed's traits of composure, intelligence and responsibility, combined with all of his other excellent aspects, continue to make him the first choice in this role and all of the other roles designed to serve humankind.

In recent years, hip dysplasia has declined in incidence in the breed. This x-ray shows perceptible hip dysplasia in a German Shepherd Dog, which must be treated as soon as possible.



SHEPHERD SERVICE

The German Shepherd Dog has been used in more areas of service to humankind than any other breed. Here are ten important areas that the breed has served:

1. Police and military work.
2. Herding livestock for farms and ranches.
3. Guides for the blind.
4. Hearing dogs for the deaf.
5. Arson and bomb detection.
6. Drug and substance detection.
7. Guard dogs for businesses and residences.
8. Search-and-rescue/avalanche, disaster and earthquake work.
9. Therapy dogs for hospitals.
10. Cancer detection.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS AND HEREDITARY DISEASES

Given the care that love and respect for the animal demand, the German Shepherd Dog is a tough and healthy breed. It has been frequently stressed here that the German Shepherd Dog was, from his earliest history, developed as a working animal and, therefore, frequent and, above all, purposeful activity is essential to his health. Without regular exercise and activity, the breed is foremost susceptible to rheumatism, the symptoms of which are similar to those seen in humans: swelling and stiffening of the affected joints and pain in movement. Because some

of the symptoms of this condition are shared by the far more serious hip dysplasia, prompt professional attention is necessary when symptoms are first displayed.

Skin problems are also frequent in the breed. Slow, constant scratching, as opposed to the short burst of scratching associated with fleas, is a sign of skin trouble. If observed early, the majority of these problems can be reduced quickly by veterinary care and diet.

Other diseases and conditions found in the German Shepherd Dogs are not exclusive to the breed but are shared by others of its various type. Because, for example, the German Shepherd Dog is a large breed, it is affected

by osteochondritis dissecans, panosteitis, hypertrophic osteodystrophy and myasthenia gravis, all diseases of the bone.

Because of his shepherding nature, the German Shepherd Dog is prone to the eye conditions typical of this category of dog like Collie eye, pannus, cataracts and retinal dysplasia.

Epilepsy is another condition that affects shepherding dogs. Blood conditions like von Willebrand's disease and hemophilia A, and heart problems such as patent or persistent ductus arteriosus and persistent right aortic arch, are problems that affect most canines and the German Shepherd Dog is not excluded.



Elbow dysplasia in a three-and-a-half-year-old male German Shepherd Dog.

No discussion of health concerning the German Shepherd Dog can end, however, without more detailed talk about hip dysplasia (HD). German Shepherd Dogs have the highest percentage rate of HD of any breed. The fact that it stands to reason that the most popular and excessively bred dog should most reveal this hereditary condition does nothing to ameliorate the seriousness of the problem.

Dysplastic dogs have incorrectly developed hip joints that are prone to arthritis and are wildly painful. These dogs are unable to work or even move without discomfort. Breeders and veterinarians continue to study this condition and guard against its occurrence, but it is the responsibility of every prospective German Shepherd Dog owner to know that the parents and grandparents of his puppy had hips rated good or better.

It is possible that part of the breed's predisposition to this condition may have been caused by the early developer's exaggeration of the powerful downward curve of the animals' posture. If true, it is sad that the unassailable, largely unchanged character of this noble breed should be linked to this weakness, unknowingly fostered by its earliest architects.

More recently, elbow dysplasia has become a concern and screening criteria have also

been developed. Those genetic physical problems to which the breed is heir are considerations that are best countered by careful planning and care in the choice and selection of breeder and animal.

Although the list of congenital diseases to which German Shepherd Dogs are prone is somewhat daunting, most representatives of the breed are healthy indeed. Many Shepherds can live heartily past ten years of age, and some have been known to be exuberant teenagers. Since the German Shepherd by nature is an active working dog, good health and soundness, both physical and mental, is an absolute necessity for all breed members.

When selecting your German Shepherd puppy, do not shop for convenience and do not be thrifty. You deserve to have the best dog that your money can buy. A well-bred Shepherd from quality stock (lines that have been tested for hereditary problems for generations) is your best choice. Even though a Shepherd with only mild dysplasia can still lead a normal life, no one wants to see his best friend compromised in any fashion. It is strongly recommended that you, as a potential owner, thoroughly investigate your puppy before purchase, so that your heart is not shattered by adopting a lovely dog with serious health problems.