

Rare Breed Spotlight: Miniature Australian Shepherd

Intelligent and versatile, these playful portables can't help but make people smile.

By Alice Bixler

Good things come in small packages. Just ask the owners of Miniature Australian Shepherds.

To delve into the history of the Mini Aussie, it's necessary to discuss the heritage of the popular Australian Shepherd, a herding breed that originated in Spain and France, and then was developed in the United States. So why is the breed called Australian?

Spain has long been famed for its sheep, which were frequently tended by Basque herders, who inhabited northern Spain and Southern France, and their "little blue dogs" (as they were called) in the Pyrenees Mountains. When Australians began sheep farming, they started purchasing Spain's Merino sheep. On the trip Down Under, the sheep were accompanied by the Basque shepherds and their dogs.

In the early 1900s, farmers in the western United States purchased Merino sheep from Australia, and once again, the Basques and their dogs escorted them. That was the North American introduction of the Australian Shepherd, so called because Australia was the breed's last port of departure.

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