

## Shetland Sheepdogs

**Wanted: Vivacious, intelligent and loyal Sheltie in search of like-minded life partner.**

*By Audrey Pavia*

A beautiful coat, athletic ability and plenty of smarts—the Shetland Sheepdog possesses all three of these attributes and more, making the breed a popular choice for people who love attractive, high-energy dogs.

It's important to carefully match your personality and lifestyle with that of the breed you are considering. How do you know if the Sheltie is right for you?

Finding out the answer to this question is pretty straightforward. You need to understand what the Sheltie really is, and then who you really are to see if you are compatible.

### Sheltie Style

"The typical Shetland Sheepdog is a sweet, affectionate and loyal companion," says breeder Jean Simmonds of Carmylie Shelties in Chatham, New York. "Shelties are extremely intelligent—sometimes to the point of being scary! More often than not, Shelties want to be constantly near their person or people, and they are very anxious to please. They tend to be very attached to their own person or family, and not particularly interested in fawning over strangers."

"Most adult Shelties like a nice romp in the yard or a long walk before coming in the house to hang out with the family," says Breeya E. Barbree of Shadymist Shetland Sheepdogs in Purcellville, Virginia. "Then, they enjoy curling up with the family to read or watch television. They are sensitive, loyal and very people oriented, and make great family dogs. They pad from room to room with their people, making sure they aren't left out of any activity."

Barbree notes that Shelties like to be included in just about any family activity. "They want to participate, whether it be soccer games, boat rides, hiking or hanging out at home," she says. "The more you expose your puppy to, the more it will want to tag along as an adult."

"Shelties normally have a very good temperament," says Sandi Sossamon, a Sheltie breeder in Farmersville, Texas. "They are great with children because of their easygoing attitude. Their feelings are easily hurt because they are sensitive. They understand when you are having a bad day, are depressed or are not feeling well."

Lynda Bernier of Cathance Shetland Sheepdogs in Topsham, Maine, has found that Shelties are very trainable. "They are an extremely responsive and highly intelligent breed," Bernier says. "In training, they respond best to praise and reward and never need harsh punishment. Shelties are among the easiest breeds to train and are very responsive to positive reinforcement."

"The Shetland Sheepdog is a highly intelligent, loyal breed that responds well to gentle, positive training methods," agrees Sherrie Sparling of Skyehaven Shetland Sheepdogs in Ile des Chenes, Manitoba, Canada. "They are sensitive and can be unforgiving if wronged. Shelties do not tolerate rough handling or harsh punishment—usually a stern 'No!' and a scolding will correct unacceptable behavior."

Sossamon believes that Shelties are ideal as a family partner. "I believe you can't ask for a better dog as a companion," she says. "They understand you completely. They are very smart and loving, and will give you 100 percent of their love and faithfulness. They are also funny animals and will follow you wherever you go. They ask for a pat on the head now and then, just to let them know that you care."

Physically, the Shetland Sheepdog is medium in size and has a thick, luxurious coat. "The coat should be double, the outer coat consisting of long, straight, harsh hair; the undercoat short, furry, and so dense as to give the entire coat its 'standoff' quality," reads the American Kennel Club's Shetland Sheepdog breed standard. Consequently, Shelties need to receive weekly grooming to keep that coat looking nice—with more frequent attention during shedding season.

Shetland Sheepdogs have plenty of energy, the result of centuries of breeding as a herding dog. They also have a tendency to be big "talkers" for this same reason, because barking at sheep, goats, ducks or cattle is part of every

herding dog's job. This barking is often put to good use as part of the Sheltie's watchdog persona, although the breed does not make a good guard dog.

Shelties are typically healthy dogs, but they can be prone to certain genetic ailments. Hereditary eye disease, hip dysplasia, von Willebrand's disease (a clotting disorder), thyroid disease, dermatomyositis (a serious skin disease), epilepsy and allergies are problems you may eventually have to deal with. Acquiring your Sheltie from a reputable breeder who tests breeding stock for genetic illness can help reduce your chances of getting a dog with some of these problems.