



Official Breed Standard

Australian Shepherd (Herding Group)

A Breed Standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function with soundness essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be mindful of features which could be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed.

UTILIZATION:

Farm and ranch shepherd dog.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY:

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 the association with Basque Shepherders who came to the United States from Australia in the 1800's. The Australian Shepherd's popularity rose steadily with the boom of western horseback riding after World War II, which became known to the general public via rodeos, horse shows, movies and television shows. Their inherent versatile and trainable personality made them assets to American farms and ranches. The American stockman continued the development of the breed, maintaining its versatility, keen intelligence, strong herding instincts, and eye-catching appearance that originally won their admiration. Although each individual is unique in colour and markings, all Australian Shepherds show an unsurpassed devotion to their families. Their main attributes have guaranteed the Australian Shepherd's continued popularity.

GENERAL APPEARANCE:

The Australian Shepherd is well balanced, slightly longer than tall, of medium size and bone, with colouring that offers variety and individuality. He is attentive and animated, lithe and agile, solid and muscular without cloddiness. He has a coat of moderate length and coarseness. He has a docked or natural tail.

IMPORTANT PROPORTIONS:

Measuring from the breastbone to rear of thigh and from top of the withers to the ground, the Australian Shepherd is slightly longer than tall.

Solidly built with moderate bone. Structure in the male reflects masculinity without coarseness. Bitches appear feminine without being slight of bone.

BEHAVIOUR/TEMPERAMENT:

The Australian Shepherd is an intelligent working dog of strong herding and guarding instincts. He is a loyal companion and has the stamina to work all day. With an even disposition, he is good natured, seldom quarrelsome. He may be somewhat reserved in initial meetings. **HEAD:** The head is clean cut, strong and dry. Overall size should be in proportion to the body.

CRANIAL REGION:

Skull: Top flat to slightly domed. It may show a slight occipital protuberance. Length and width are equal.

Stop: Moderate, well defined.

FACIAL REGION:

Nose: Blue merles and blacks have black pigmentation on the nose (and lips). Red merles and reds have liver (brown) pigmentation on the nose (and lips). On the merles it is permissible to have small pink spots, however, they should not exceed 25% of the nose on dogs over one year of age, which is a serious fault.

Muzzle: Equal in length or slightly shorter than the back skull. Viewed from the side the topline of the back skull and muzzle form parallel planes, divided by a moderate, well defined stop. The muzzle tapers little from base to nose and is rounded at the tip.

Jaws/Teeth: A full complement of strong white teeth should meet in a scissors bite or may meet in a pincer bite.

Eyes: Brown, blue, amber or any variation or combination thereof, including flecks and marbling. Almond shaped, not protruding nor sunken. The blue merles and blacks have black pigmentation on eye rims. The red merles and reds have liver (brown) pigmentation on eye rims. Expression: Showing attentiveness and intelligence, alert and eager. Gaze should be keen but friendly.

Ears: Triangular, of moderate size and leather, set high on the head. At full attention they break forward and over, or to the side as a rose ear.

NECK:

Strong, of moderate length, slightly arched at the crest, fitting well into the shoulders.

BODY:

Topline: Back straight and strong, level and firm from withers to hip joints.

Croup: Moderately sloping.

Chest: Not broad but deep with the lowest point reaching the elbow.

Ribs: Well sprung and long, neither barrel chested nor slab-sided.

Underline and Belly: Shows a moderate tuck-up.

TAIL:

Straight, naturally long or naturally short. When docked (in countries where this practice is not forbidden), or naturally short not to exceed (10 cm).

[*refer note below]

LIMBS:

Forequarters

Shoulder: Shoulder blades long, flat, fairly close set at the withers and well laid back. The upper arm, which should be relatively the same length as the shoulder blade, attaches at an approximate right angle to the shoulder line with forelegs dropping straight, perpendicular to the ground.

Legs: Straight and strong. Bone strong, oval rather than round.

Metacarpus (Pastern): Medium length and very slightly sloping. Front dewclaws may be removed.

Forefeet: Oval, compact with close knit, well arched toes. Pads thick and resilient.

Hindquarters

General appearance: The width of the hindquarters is equal to the width of the forequarters at the shoulders. The angulation of the pelvis and upper thigh corresponds to the angulation of the shoulder blade and upper arm, forming an approximate right angle.

Stifles: Clearly defined.

Hock Joints: Moderately bent.

Hocks: Short, perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other when viewed from the rear. No rear dewclaws.

Hind feet: Oval, compact with close knit, well arched toes. Pads thick and resilient.

GAIT:

The Australian Shepherd has a smooth, free and easy gait. He exhibits great agility of movement with a well balanced, ground covering stride. Fore and hind legs move straight and parallel with the centre line of the body. As speed increases, the feet (front and rear) converge toward the centre line of gravity of the dog while the back remains firm and level. The Australian Shepherd must be agile and able to change direction or alter gait instantly.

COAT:

Hair: Of medium texture, straight to wavy, weather resistant and of medium length. The undercoat varies in quantity with variations in climate. Hair is short and smooth on the head, ears, front of forelegs and below the hocks. Backs of forelegs and breeches are moderately feathered. There is a moderate mane and frill, more pronounced in dogs than in bitches.

Colour: Blue merle, black, red merle, red - all with or without white markings and/or tan markings with no order of preference. The hairline of a white collar does not exceed the point of the withers at the skin. White is acceptable on the neck (either in part or as a full collar), chest, legs, muzzle underparts, blaze on head and white extension from underpart up to four (4) inches (10 cm), measuring from a horizontal line at the elbow. White on the head should not predominate and the eyes must be fully surrounded by colour and pigment. Merles characteristically become darker with increasing age.

SIZE:

Height at the Withers: The preferred height for males is 20-23 inches (51-58 cm), females 18-21 inches (46-53 cm). Quality is not to be sacrificed in favour of size.

FAULTS:

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog.

SEVERE FAULTS:

Prick ears and hanging ears.

Non-typical coats.

DISQUALIFYING FAULTS:

• Aggressive or overly shy

Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities shall be disqualified.

• Undershot or overshot by more than 1/8 inch. Loss of contact caused by short centre incisors in an

otherwise correct bite shall not be judged undershot. Teeth broken or missing by accident shall not be penalised.

- White body splashes in all colours, which means white on body between withers and tail, on sides between elbows and back of hindquarters

NB:

Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

Only clinically and functionally healthy dogs with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.

***Regardless of the provisions of the current KUSA-adopted standard, docked and formerly docked breeds may be shown at all FCI- and KUSA-licensed shows in South Africa, whether their tails are docked, or natural. Under no circumstances are judges permitted to discriminate against exhibits on the grounds of docked, or natural tails and equal consideration for awards must be given to either. (Fedco 12/2017)**



Copyright FCI - Reprinted with permission

The publisher of this edition is the Kennel Union of Southern Africa. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without permission in writing from the publisher.

FCI Standard No. 342 (Grp 1)

FCI 24.07.96 26.03.2009

Exco 2/98

01.02.2008/AA/Fedco 11.07 04.12.2016

Most recent changes to this Standard has an effective date of 01.02.2017

[Click here to download the PDF version of the official KUSA breed standard.](#)

Download