

AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance including the correct colour of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure. However, if a dog possesses a feature, characteristic or colour described as unacceptable, it must not be rewarded in the show ring.

Most recent changes to this Standard have an effective date of 01/02/2017

ORIGIN

United States.

UTILISATION

Farm and ranch shepherd dog.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

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 1800s. 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 stockmen 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 many attributes have guaranteed the Australian Shepherd's continued popularity.



Illustration courtesy of NKU Picture Library

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 and teeth: A full complement of strong white teeth should meet in a scissor bite or may meet in a pincer bite.

Eyes:

Brown, blue, amber or any variation or combination thereof, including flecks and marbling. Almond-shaped, neither 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.

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.

Stifle (knee): Clearly defined.

Hock joint: Moderately bent.

Metatarsus (rear pastern): Short, perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other when viewed from the rear. No rear dewclaws.

FEET

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

GAIT / MOVEMENT

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

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 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 withers:

Males: 51cm – 58cm (approx. 20" – 23").

Females: 46cm – 53cm (approx. 18" to 21").

Quality is not to be sacrificed in favour of size.

***N.B.** Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum. Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.*

*Regardless of the provisions of the current KUSA-adopted standard, docked or 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.

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, and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.

Severe faults:

- Prick ears and hanging ears.
- Atypical coats.

Disqualifying faults:

- Aggressive or overly shy.
- Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities.
- Undershot. Overshot by more than one-eighth inch. Loss of contact caused by short center 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.

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FCI Standard No 342: AUSTRALIAN SHEPHERD

FCI Classification: Group 1 – Sheepdogs & Cattle dogs (except Swiss Cattle dogs)
Section 1. Sheepdog
Without Working Trial