The German Shepherd Dog - Muzzle -Stop Flew Shoulder Skull - Carpus or Wrist Forearm Crest Neck Withers Dewclaw -Pastern – Elbow – Stiffle or Knee Back Loin Hock



Chapter 1

What Is a German Shepherd Dog?

he German Shepherd Dog is a dog of legend. Everyone, no matter where they live, knows what a German Shepherd Dog looks like: those upright ears, the piercing eyes that can see into your soul, and the traditional

black and tan coat. German Shepherd Dogs are, and have been, one of the most loved dogs on the planet, usually ranking in the top ten for number of registrations with the American Kennel Club. Unfortunately, the breed has also made some enemies, and in some cities and counties it is illegal to own a German Shepherd Dog. Some homeowner's insurance companies will not insure families who own German Shepherd Dogs.

Fortunately, throughout its history the breed has had some well-known supporters, both in the past and today. Several U.S. presidents have owned German Shepherds, including John F. Kennedy and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Actors and celebrities who have treasured the breed include Jack LaLanne, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Eva and Zsa Zsa Gabor, George Hamilton, and David Letterman. And of course, no one who was a fan of the old Westerns can forget Roy Rogers' dog, Bullet! Sigmund Freud was also a German Shepherd Dog owner; hmmm, wonder what that says about him?

The Herding Breeds

The German Shepherd Dog (also known as a GSD) is a herding dog and is descended from other herding dog breeds. Although often known for his working abilities in areas far removed from herding work, he is, deep in his heart, still



The German Shepherd is a herding breed; that heritage shapes much of his character.

a herding dog. The American Kennel Club and other registries that recognize the breed also classify the GSD as a member of the Herding Group for dogshow competitions.

Herding dogs have several characteristics in common. First of all, they are usually very bright, intelligent, and quick to learn. Training is usually quite easy. However, intelligence is not always a sign of compliance; herding breeds can also think for themselves, and this can be a challenge to their owners.

Herding breeds are also active. Bred to work livestock every day, often on a farm, these dogs need daily exercise and a job to do. Without enough exercise and an occupation to keep them busy, herding dogs can find other things to amuse themselves, such as herding the family children or the cat. Most herding dogs are also great athletes.

GSDs were originally developed from German herding and farm dogs and still retain the abilities and strong work ethic of those dogs. We'll take a look at the breed history in chapter 2; keep in mind that today's GSD shares many characteristics with other herding dogs, both in the past and today. Yet, despite that, today's German Shepherd Dog is a versatile dog.

The GSD's Physical Appearance

The German Shepherd Dog should always present an overall appearance of a strong, athletic dog who is well muscled yet not bulky. He is well balanced; not clumsy nor spindly. The GSD is a dog who is always ready for a challenge.

There is a definite difference in appearance between the sexes. Male GSDs should definitely look masculine: strong, thick necked, and with heavier bones. Females are more feminine: strong and athletic yet not as heavily boned or muscled as the males. In this section, I describe the ideal German Shepherd Dog, based on the breed standard.

The Head

When looking at a GSD, the head is perhaps the most striking and, for most people, the most recognizable feature of the breed. The eyes are of medium size, slightly almond shaped, and dark. When people say the eyes are the window to the soul, that surely applies to GSDs! The dog's eyes are alert, expressive, and full of life.

The muzzle is long, but not as fine as a Collie's nor as heavily muscled as one of the bull breeds. The nose is of moderate size and black. The muzzle slopes upward to the skull, where the forehead is slightly arched. The head is muscled but not heavily so.

The GSD's ears are carried erect and facing forward. The base of the ear is wide and the tips are slightly rounded. The ears are very expressive and mobile, moving according to the dog's activities and emotions.

The Body

The neck is powerful yet not overly muscled. When the dog is alert, the neck carries the head high, but when the dog is relaxed or in motion, the head's normal position is forward and slightly above the shoulders. The chest is deep with room for the large heart and lungs, yet never barrel-shaped. The *topline* (from the point of the shoulders to the top of the hips) is straight but sloping downward, with the point of the shoulders higher than the top of the hips.

In proportion, the GSD's body is longer than he is tall at the top point of the shoulders (called the *withers*). This proportion often appears exaggerated when show dogs are posed with one back leg tucked under the hips and the other back leg stretched out behind the dog.

Other Physical Characteristics

Although many German Shepherd Dogs today are very large, the breed is supposed to be of medium size, standing from twenty-two to twenty-six inches tall at the withers, with females slightly smaller than the males. An overly large dog may not have the energy, agility, or stamina to work as the breed has been bred



The German Shepherd has a striking, strong head and a powerful body.

to do. On the other hand, a dog smaller than the standard calls for may not have the power necessary to perform his traditional jobs.

The breed's tail is long, with the last vertebra reaching to the *hock* (the rearfacing elbow joint on the back leg). When relaxed, the tail may have a slight curve. The coat on the tail is bushy, with longer hairs on the underside. When excited, the tail is very expressive, swinging widely, but it should never be carried higher than the level of the back.

This breed is known for its flowing, effortless trot. The AKC breed standard calls for a smooth trot that covers the maximum amount of ground with a minimum number of steps. To do this, the body must be strong, well muscled, and in correct proportion. In motion, the hind legs have tremendous reach, with the rear feet hitting the ground forward of the footprint left by the front feet.

The Coat and Colors

The American Kennel Club recognizes one coat type: a medium-length coat with a dense, harsh outercoat and a softer undercoat. Both the undercoat and outercoat shed a little bit daily and heavily twice a year. (This heavy shed is called "blowing coat.") The face, front of the legs, and paws have a shorter coat. The back of the legs and the tail have a slightly longer coat.

What Is a Breed Standard?

A breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect dog of that breed. Breeders use the standard as a guide in their breeding programs, and judges use it to evaluate the dogs in conformation shows. The standard is written by the national breed club, using guidelines established by the registry that recognizes the breed (such as the AKC or UKC).

The first section of the breed standard gives a brief overview of the breed's history. Then it describes the dog's general appearance and size as an adult. Next is a detailed description of the head and neck, then the back and body, and the front and rear legs. The standard then describes the ideal coat and how the dog should be presented in the show ring. It also lists all acceptable colors, patterns, and markings. Then there's a section on how the dog moves, called *gait*. Finally, there's a general description of the dog's temperament.

Each section also lists characteristics that are considered to be faults or disqualifications in the conformation ring. Superficial faults in appearance are often what distinguish a pet-quality dog from a show- or competition-quality dog. However, some faults affect the way a dog moves or his overall health. And faults in temperament are serious business.

You can read all the AKC breed standards at www.akc.org.

GSDs with a longer coat are often seen; in fact, it's not unusual to have one longer coated puppy in a litter of shorter coated brothers and sisters. Often called a lush or plush coat, many experts believe this coat type is the genetic heritage of the original herding dogs used to create the GSD. Although the American Kennel Club calls the longer coat a fault, these coats are often seen (and looked upon favorably) in Germany and other European countries.

The plush coat occasionally turns up in a litter. It's probably a reflection of the herding breeds originally used to develop the German Shepherd. The most recognizable color for this breed is the black saddle over the back, with a black



muzzle and black ears, and a rich, reddish brown background color. But the breed standard also accepts other colors and combinations. Bicolor GSDs can be black and tan, black and red, black and brown, or black and silver. Dogs with tricolored hairs (each individual coat hair has bands of three colors, such as black, brown, and red) are called sables, and these can be silver, red, cream, or a variety of other related colors. GSDs can also be entirely black. The American Kennel Club's German Shepherd breed standard

prefers strong, rich colors and states that pale, washed-out colors and blues and livers are serious faults. White GSDs are not an acceptable color under the AKC breed standard.

Although white GSDs may not compete in AKC conformation dog shows, white GSDs have been a part of the breed since its earliest history. Today, many enthusiasts of the white GSD have formed their own clubs to promote the dogs.

The GSD's Character

German Shepherd owners like to praise the breed's noble and unique appearance, especially the eyes, ears, and alert head carriage. Others enjoy the breed's flowing, effortless trot. But most often, fanciers rave about the GSD's character: his devotion to his owners, his intelligence and trainability, and his fearlessness in the face of danger.

The ideal GSD is a playmate to the family's children yet will also herd them away from danger. He is a jogging partner but will also sleep quietly under your desk at home. He is a tennis ball fanatic, retrieving every ball thrown, and then will rest unobtrusively while you visit with friends. The German Shepherd Dog can be silly and playful, yet when the situation warrants, he will protect his family and friends against all enemies, even if it results in his own death.

Family and Friends

The German Shepherd Dog is one of the most devoted breeds known to humanity. When you are loved by a GSD, you will always be greeted with a "Woo woo!" (By the way, GSDs are also very vocal and think they can talk!) and a wildly wagging tail, even if you've only been gone a few minutes. They are devoted family dogs, loving all members of the family with equal loyalty and affection. They are also very devoted to their friends. Once you have been accepted as a friend, you will be greeted each and every time the dog sees you, even if it's only a few times a year. These dogs have great memories.

However, reaching the point of being accepted as a friend is not automatic. This breed does not look upon every member of the human race as a friend and often views strangers as potential problems. However, if his owner has accepted you, the German Shepherd Dog will watch for awhile to see if you appear trustworthy and then may add you to his list of friends. Don't try to cajole or baby talk this breed, though, in the hopes of making friends; GSDs have entirely too much dignity and intelligence to be fooled by that.

German Shepherd Dogs can also become one-person dogs, sometimes to the point of becoming dangerous to other people. Some fanciers feel this trait is hereditary, while others believe that if a dog is not socialized enough as a puppy, he can become too attached to one person. Until we know for sure what causes this tendency, breed experts recommend lots of socialization to people of all ages, sexes, and ethnic backgrounds during puppyhood and adolescence.



The German Shepherd is a loyal friend, a great playmate, and a fierce defender.

Loyal Defender

One of the breed's historic occupations has been as a police and law enforcement dog. The breed's strong protective instincts, distrust of strangers, and high trainability have created an all-purpose working dog with few rivals.

In your home, your German Shepherd Dog will bark when anyone approaches your home, property, or vehicle. If the person is recognized, the bark will turn to vocalizations of joy. However, if the person is a stranger, the barking will continue until the person leaves or you tell your dog, "That's enough, thank you." If someone should be foolish enough to break into your house, these dogs will not hesitate to use force to defend their home and family.

Most GSD puppies are so wiggly, cute, and silly that some owners feel the dog may be missing out on those protective instincts. Some will go so far as to encourage any signs of protectiveness. Unfortunately, this encouragement can cause problems later. Most GSD puppies begin to feel more protective when they are 10 to 14 months old, and even then should be discouraged from expressing too much of this. At this age, they are still mentally immature and are not ready to make adult decisions. Later, when the dog is 18 to 24 months of age and mentally mature, his natural protectiveness can be encouraged through responsible training.

Intelligence and Trainability

There are few breeds as intelligent and as trainable as the German Shepherd Dog. Created to be a superb working dog, a German Shepherd Dog is smart enough to think through problems. For example, many have learned how to open doors of various kinds, even those with round handles. German Shepherd Dogs have been taught to do many things, from complicated trick training to carting and weight pulling; from therapy dog work to guide and service dog work; from tracking and search and rescue work to Schutzhund (a type of competition that includes tracking, obedience, and protection work). This intelligence and trainability can be awe inspiring at times.

Luckily, most GSDs do want to please their owners, especially once they are past the challenges of puppyhood and adolescence. This desire to please, combined with the breed's high intelligence, means that training must be a prominent part of every GSD's life, from early puppyhood on into adulthood. Training should be fun and positive, yet structured and firm. Without structure, household rules, and guidelines for social behavior, a GSD will take advantage of you. However, with structure and rules, and fun training, a GSD will thrive.



German Shepherds have distinguished themselves in law enforcement and search-and-rescue work.

Busy Dogs

German Shepherd Dogs do best in an active home where the family members want to do things with them. If left alone for too many hours per day, many GSDs will act out with destructive behavior. These dogs have been known to dig tremendous holes in the backyard, chew down all the bushes and small trees in the yard, bark nonstop for hours, or chew destructively in the house. My first GSD, Watachie, destroyed an eight-foot-long sofa in one day. This was my first GSD, and at the time I didn't realize exactly what a GSD is and what his needs are, and I left him alone far too much. However, I learned—although that lesson destroyed my sofa in the process!

If you like to jog, go for hikes, go camping, or better yet, enjoy participating in dog sports (such as agility, obedience, flyball, or herding) and take the dog with you, he will be very happy. German Shepherd Dogs were bred to work, and they are definitely happier and better behaved when they have a job to do.

The Stuff of Legends

German Shepherd Dogs are the dogs whom legends are made of. Not only do these dogs have awe-inspiring intelligence and an attention-grabbing appearance, but their versatility has made them capable of many different occupations. This ability to do just about anything their owners ask of them (and sometimes much more) is what creates legends—for the dogs' owners and for the general public.

Watachie, the same dog who ate my sofa, was enrolled in dog-training class the week after the sofa incident so that I could learn to prevent future bad behavior. With training, he eventually earned advanced obedience titles, competed in dog sports, and became a certified search-and-rescue dog. To me, his devoted owner, those things alone made him a superstar. However, as a search-and-rescue dog, Watachie became a legend when he found an older gentleman who had wandered away from a nursing home and got lost, and when he found a 6-year-old boy who had gotten lost in the woods when his family was camping. Those families will never forget Watachie, even though he passed away many years ago.

Innumerable other German Shepherd Dogs have also shown that they have what it takes to be legendary superstars. There was Bruno, a very young GSD who remained with his young owner who had fallen from his bicycle and knocked himself unconscious. Bruno stayed with his boy, licking his face, until he regained consciousness and help arrived. Sam, an older GSD, pulled his owner from a fast-moving, icy river after she fell in. Hunter stayed with his owner after she fell from her horse. She was severely injured in the fall, and Hunter guarded her, fighting off coyotes, throughout the night until help found them nine hours later. Tracker served the Sudbury, Ontario, police force for more than seven years and was involved in more than 500 searches for drugs, criminals, and missing people. So many GSDs have shown themselves to be heroes that it is impossible to list them all.

Probably the most well-known GSD legends, though, were Strongheart and Rin Tin Tin. Strongheart was born in Germany in 1917 into a family of carefully bred working dogs. American trainer Larry Trimble was looking for an outstanding dog who had the charisma to star in Hollywood movies. He fell in love with the 3-year-old dog, and soon after, so did the American public. Larger than today's GSDs, Strongheart was a loving, well-trained dog who looked magnificent on screen and became, literally, larger than life.

Rin Tin Tin was born around the same time, 1918, but instead of being born into canine aristocracy, Rin Tin Tin was rescued by an American soldier in bomb-ravaged France. Taken to America, Rinty (as he was called by his owner) quickly learned tricks and became an amazing athlete. Discovered by the film producer Charles Jones, Rinty became the star of many movies. After his death in 1932, his offspring also appeared in movies and on television.