



Belgian Shepherd Dog

The breed standard outlines the ideal characteristics, temperament, and appearance of a breed, and ensures that a dog can carry out its original purpose. Breeders and judges should be mindful to prioritize dogs that are healthy and sound in both mind and body.

Origin and purpose

The Belgian Shepherd Dog's ancestry is common to many of the herding dogs used throughout the world. His type is a result of the rugged Belgian climate and the requirements of the Belgian Shepherd for a bright, strong, and agile dog. In addition to being a loyal companion and active family dog, the Belgian Shepherd is a versatile breed that excels in a range of work including herding, search and rescue, police and military service, as well as performance sports such as utility trials (IGP/Schutzhund, Ring programs), agility, obedience, tracking and many non-traditional events.

General appearance

The first impression of the Belgian Shepherd Dog is of a well-balanced square dog, elegant in appearance, with an exceedingly proud carriage of head and neck. He is a strong, agile, well-muscled animal, alert and full of life. His whole conformation gives the impression of depth and solidity without bulkiness. The male appears unquestionably masculine; the female has a distinctively feminine look. The male and female are to be judged with equal consideration.

Like many European breeds, different coat colours, textures, and lengths were preferred by the original fanciers. Today, four distinct coat types are recognized and are the distinguishing characteristics of the four varieties of Belgian Shepherd Dog. The long-haired Groenendael and Tervueren, the short-haired Malinois, and the rough-haired Laekenois variety differ in coat colour, length and texture but are unmistakably the same breed.

Temperament

The Belgian Shepherd Dog reflects the qualities of intelligence, courage, alertness, and devotion. In addition to his inherent aptitude as guardian of flocks he is protective of the person and property of his owner and possesses a strong sense of family. He is watchful, attentive, and always in motion when not under command. In his relationship with humans, he is observant and vigilant with strangers but not apprehensive. He should not show fear or shyness. He should not show viciousness by unwarranted or unprovoked attack. With those he knows well, he is most affectionate, friendly, zealous of their attention, and very possessive.

Size

Males are 61-66 cm (24-26 in) in height and females 56-61 cm (22-24 in) measured at the withers. The length, measured from the front of the forechest to the rear projection of the pelvis, is equal to the height. Females may be slightly longer. Bone structure is moderately heavy in proportion to height so that they are well balanced throughout and neither spindly and leggy nor cumbersome and bulky.

Coat & colour

Coat length, colour, and texture are the distinguishing features between the different varieties of the Belgian Shepherd Dog.

(a) Long-haired

The guard hairs of the coat are long, well fitting, straight and abundant. The texture is a medium harshness. The undercoat is extremely dense, commensurate, however, with climatic conditions. The hair is shorter on the head, outside of the ears, and lower part of the legs. The opening of the ear is protected by tufts of hair. There is long and abundant hair forming a collarette around the neck, a fringe along the back of the foreleg, breeches in the hindquarters, and a nicely plumed tail. The two long-haired varieties are differentiated by colour:

- (i) The dog is completely black or black with white limited as noted below. The black, long-haired variety is known as the GROENENDAEL.



(ii) The dog is either rich fawn to russet mahogany or distinctly grey, each with a black overlay. The coat is characteristically double pigmented, wherein the tip of each hair is blackened. On mature males, this blackening is especially pronounced on the shoulders, back, and rib section. The chest colour is a mixture of black and grey. The face has a black mask and the ears are mostly black. The underparts of the body, tail, and breeches are light beige or grey. Any white is limited as noted below. A washed-out fawn colour is a fault, as is excessive blackening. This variety is known as the TERVUEREN.

(b) Short-haired

The coat is comparatively short and straight with a dense undercoat. The coat is very short on the head, ears and lower legs and somewhat longer around the neck where it forms a collarette and on the tail and back of the thighs. The colour is rich fawn to mahogany with a black overlay, black mask and black ears. The underparts of the body, tail, and breeches are lighter fawn. Any white is limited as noted below. A washed-out fawn colour is a fault. This variety is known as the MALINOIS.

(c) Rough-haired

The coat has a rough or dry texture and appears unkempt. The undercoat is thick and woolly. The coat is of medium length on all parts of the body except the head where the hair on the skull is short while the hair on the muzzle is slightly longer forming a beard or whiskers. The tail does not form a plume. The coat is light fawn to red brown in colour. Grey is acceptable as well. Blackening may appear on the muzzle, ears, and tail. The underparts of the dog, tail, and breeches are light beige or grey. Any white is limited as noted below. This variety is known as the LAEKENOIS.

For all varieties, any white is limited as follows: a small to moderate patch on the forechest, not to extend more than 7.6 cm (3 in) above the prosternum, and not to reach the point of either shoulder. White is also allowed between the pads of the feet, and on the tips of the toes. Frosting on the chin and muzzle is normal.

Head

Head is well-chiselled, long without exaggeration, and exhibits parallel planes whereby the topline of the muzzle is parallel to the topline of the skull when viewed from the side.

Skull is flattened on top rather than rounded. The width is approximately the same as, but not wider than the length. The stop is moderate.

Muzzle is moderately pointed, avoiding any tendency to snipiness, and approximately equal in length to the top skull.

Nose is black without spots or discoloured areas.

Mouth: The jaw is strong and powerful. The lips are tight and black with no pink showing on the outside. There is a full complement of strong, white, evenly-set teeth that meet in either an even or a scissors bite. An overshot or undershot bite is a serious fault.

Eyes are dark brown, medium sized, slightly almond shaped and do not protrude.

Ears are rather small, triangular in shape, stiff, erect, and high set.

Neck

Neck is well-muscled, long, and slightly arched.

Forequarters

Shoulder is long and oblique, laid flat against the body and forms a sharp angle (approximately 90°) with the upper arm, which is equal in length to the shoulder blade. Legs are straight, strong and parallel to each other. The bone is oval rather than round. The length is in proportion to the size of the dog. Pasterns are of medium length, strong and very slightly sloped.

Body

Chest is deep but not broad. The lowest point reaches the elbow of the front leg and forms a smooth ascending curve to the abdomen.



Back is level, straight and firm from withers to hip. The withers are slightly higher than and blend into the back. Loin when viewed from above is relatively short, broad, and strong, and blends smoothly into the back. The abdomen is moderately developed and is neither tucked up nor paunchy.

Hindquarters

Croup is medium long with a gradual slope. Thighs are broad and heavily muscled. The upper and lower thigh bones form a relatively sharp angle at the stifle joint. Hocks are close to the ground. The angle at the hock is relatively sharp although the angulation is not extreme. Metatarsus are of medium length, strong, and slightly sloped. Dewclaws, if any, may be removed.

Feet

Feet are round in the front (cat-footed) and slightly elongated in the rear. Toes on both the front and back feet are curved and close together. The feet are well padded. Nails are strong and black except that they may be white to match white toe tips.

Tail

Tail is strong at the base and the bone reaches the hock. At rest, the tail is held low. In action it is carried at or below the level of the back, with a slight curl that is strongest toward the tip. It does not curl over the dog's back or form a hook.

Gait

Gait is smooth, free and tireless, demonstrating ease of movement rather than a hard driving action. He single tracks on a fast gait – i.e., the legs, both front and rear, converge toward the centre line of the body. The backline remains firm and level, parallel to the line of motion, with no crabbing. There is a marked tendency to move in a circle rather than a straight line.

Faults

Any departure from the aforementioned ideals shall be considered faulty to the degree in which it interferes with the health and well-being of the dog. In determining whether a fault is minor, serious, or major, two factors should be used as a guide:

- (a) the extent to which it deviates from the standard.
- (b) the extent to which such deviation would actually affect the working ability of the dog.

Disqualifications

- (a) Viciousness.
- (b) Excessive shyness.
- (c) Any colour or coat type and colour combination not allowed in the standard.
- (d) Ears hanging.
- (e) Tail cropped or stump.
- (f) Males under 58 cm (23 in) or over 69 cm (27 in) in height.
Females under 53 cm (21 in) or over 64 cm (25 in) in height.

Breed Name: Belgian Shepherd Dog
Year of Recognition: 1923
Effective Date: July 2023