



Achieving the Belgian Shepherd Breed Standard

Dogs Queensland Exclusive

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In the early 1800s, native shepherd dogs were a mixture of coat lengths, colours and types. These dogs were bred for their natural instincts towards guarding, herding abilities and loyalty towards their owners.

The most intelligent and courageous were used as breeding stock and in Belgium a dog of unusual beauty with intelligence, grace, courage and the ability to withstand the weather conditions emerged. This dog was the Belgian Shepherd Dog.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the need for herding dogs declined and, as a result, these animals were used to protect fields of grain, businesses, homes and farms. Around the same time, after recognising the intelligence and agility of these dogs, the breed

was also introduced to Field and Obedience Trials as well as police work. The Belgian Shepherd Dog was first introduced to police work in 1896 in the city of Ghent. By 1899, Ghent had an established a police dog department consisting of three Belgian Shepherd Dogs. This police dog service was known to be the finest in existence.

In 1891, a club, the Club du Chien de Berger Belge (The Belgian Shepherd Dog Club), was formed to determine whether there was a true shepherd dog, representative of only Belgium. A panel of judges, led by Professor Adolphe Reul determined there was a native shepherd dog of consistent type, distinct to the Brabant province.

This dog was of medium size and square, with well-set triangular ears and very dark eyes. However, there were differences in colour, texture and length of coat. Similar exhibitions were held throughout other provinces in Belgium, with similar findings.

Under the direction of professor Reul, the first breed standard for the Belgian Shepherd was issued in 1892. This was modelled on the English Collie standard of the time, and they recognised three varieties of Belgian Shepherd Dog. The long-coated blacks and



fawns, the short-coated fawn and the rough-coated greys and fawns.

This breed standard was changed several times, first in 1898 eliminating fawn rough coats and again in 1899, only allowing long coated blacks and fawn short-coated with black masking.

The Royale Saint-Hubert (Belgium's equivalent to the AKC) was petitioned for breed status in 1892 but was denied. In 1898, the Berger Belge Club took over the guidance of the breed and re-introduced the fawn colour in both long and rough coated varieties. It was during a period between 1892 through to 1901 that the Royale Saint-Hubert recognised the Belgian Shepherd Dog as a breed and that efforts were concentrated on developing a breed type along with different varieties.

Over the years, there have been many heated discussions over the interpretation of the breed standard regarding coat colours and coat texture. The breed standard seems to be continually changing and evolving with previously unacceptable colours and textures becoming accepted, and then with a change of guard, relegated to being unaccepted again.

Despite ongoing turmoil about coat colour within the breed, colour phobia has been put aside by the most astute breeders, enabling a keen focus on breed type, health and character, as more important breeding selection criteria than merely colour.

Photos courtesy of BSDCQ files by Johanna Lynch at 2013 BSDCQ Champion Show



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