



A guide to buying a Belgian Shepherd Dog

Dogs Queensland Exclusive 

Written by Kathryn Winton

The sheepdog from Belgium, with official recognition in 1891, pre-dates German Shepherds being an officially recognised breed. Belgian Shepherds Dogs from Belgium (known as Belgians, not Belgiums).

Four varieties equal one breed:

- Groenendael
- Laekenois
- Malinois
- Tervueren

Belgian Shepherd Dogs are a medium to large sized dog (around 18kg for small females and up to 25kg for large males) that are adaptable family companions that can also excel at competitive showing, obedience, herding, agility and other fun dog sports. Belgians are loyal, loving family members and thrive on being with their families, with a natural affinity for children.

Belgians come in four different varieties, which according to the breed standard, are all exactly the same except for coat colour and texture. The Groenendael is long coated black. The Tervueren is long coat fawn to grey with black face mask. The Malinois is a short coated fawn with black face mask.

Rarest of all is the Laekenois with a curly rough fawn coat. Temperaments should be similar in all four varieties, varying with family bloodline traits rather than variety, or whether male or female. Coats on all four varieties are double coated and consist of a woolly undercoat with longer guard hairs. The Groenendael and Tervueren are considered low maintenance for long coated dogs and they shed seasonally, rather than moulting all year round.



Malinois can shed all year round, with a bigger drop coming into summer. Laekenois need plucking or stripping of dead hairs out to shed coat (a little more maintenance than the other varieties).

All in all, this breed is very much a wash and wear breed, with a desirable 'No Smell' coat, sought after by many asthma sufferers. A quick brush through right to the skin once a week is generally sufficient grooming, with extra attention at moulting time.

This breed is an active breed and enjoys regular exercise. Puppy pre-school and beginners companion dog training classes are highly recommended. A well-bred Belgian should grow to a well-adjusted adult with lots of positive socialising ongoing throughout their lives. A fully fenced dog proof house and yard is essential for housing your dog safely and is a legal requirement in most states of Australia for dog ownership.

The breed is initially noticed because of its beauty. It is noted to be one of the healthiest breeds of dogs with considerably fewer health issues than other pedigree breeds and cross bred dogs.

Epilepsy occurs in some lines and this health issue is to be considered when selecting your new family member. Currently, there is no DNA test available to determine epileptic status, so breeders have to choose wisely, relying on anecdotal reporting of epilepsy in bloodlines to determine the safest breeding.

Very rarely does hip and elbow dysplasia occur, and ethical breeders have been health testing all potential breeding stock to assist with the reduction of these issues. Eye testing should be undertaken yearly on all breeding stock.

Cataracts and other eye issues are not a major problem, and ethical breeders intend to keep it that way by always health testing prior to breeding. The Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld fully endorses health testing of all breeding stock, and is happy to advise on how to read health certificates that should be supplied by breeders to prospective new owners.

Before buying a Belgian Shepherd Dog

Before making a commitment, you should visit several Belgian Shepherd Dog breeders to see how they care for their dogs before choosing the breeder of your new family companion. Both genetics and environment play an important role in shaping temperament.

Why not attend a Belgian Speciality show day or club Fun day to see a wide range of owners and the style and type of Belgians that they each choose to show and breed? As with all living creatures, there can be significant diversity in breed types between bloodlines, and different traits will appeal to different folk. The Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld will be happy to put you in touch with member breeders of Belgians in your area.



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What do you require of your dog?

Companionship. Both male and females of each of the four varieties of Belgians make excellent family companions. Choose from fully health tested breeding stock with excellent temperaments. Society also expects pets to be de-sexed, with added benefits of possible discounted council registration fees.

Working line Malinois make better security dogs than family pets unless owners are very committed to providing for their enrichment needs. If you want a Malinois just as a pet, then please consider only sourcing your puppy from a show or companion bred litter, not a working litter. There are considerably less 'high drive' issues for folk to contend with that select Groenendael, Tervueren or Laekenois varieties, which applies to show/companion bred litters of Malinois too.

Showing

Choose only the best available breed type and temperament from fully health tested breeding stock for exhibition in the show ring. Adult males with full coat look super being exhibited. Females are also shown contenders, although they may not look as glamorous as the males.

Breeding

Choose only the best available genetics, temperament and breed type for foundation breeding stock. Ensure your breeding prospects are from fully health tested stock, and fully health test all your dogs before considering breeding, paying attention to hips and elbows over twelve months of age, as well as yearly

eye tests. Begin your breeding stock with the best females, and select suitable sires from Australia or worldwide to complement your female's strengths and weaknesses. Only breed to better the breed, not for puppy sales.

Dog sports

Both males and females can make super competition dogs although de-sexed dogs can make for better work concentration and allow year round competing. Choose prospects only from fully health tested breeding stock with excellent temperaments.

The heritable 'smarts' of a Belgian Shepherd Dog means that it's not necessary to buy from dog 'sport titled' bloodlines, as most of the breed are naturally gifted with the ability to achieve well at obedience, herding, agility, tracking and other dog sports. Choose a healthy outgoing puppy.

Security

The Malinois variety of Belgian Shepherd Dog is considered the most sought after breed for commercial security work, alongside German Shepherd Dogs and Dutch Shepherd Dogs. Working line Malinois are often unsuitable for family companions due to their extremely high energy, which is perfect for security work and training. Show line Malinois, usually, make better family companions as they are often calmer and more placid (perhaps a little too placid for seekers of security prospects).

Other questions to consider

What age is appropriate? Puppies are bundles of fun, and oh so cute, but come with no pre-programming. All training, including



toilet training, needs to be taught. Adult dogs, rescue dogs, and retired show/breeding dogs are, usually, already trained to various levels of competency.

Most are house trained, often with successful completion of beginner obedience level training. Some adult dogs might need a few rough edges polished off to fit your family's requirements perfectly, but the advantage is that they have gone through the puppy stage and should settle quicker.

Things that should be checked

Always check whether the dog has been ANKC registered. All dogs bred by registered breeders in Queensland are required by Dogs Queensland rules to be sold with ANKC papers. On offer are papers for full registration for show (which includes breeding prospects or de-sexed pets) and limited registration (endorsed not to be shown or bred). Dogs considered by breeders not suitable to be kept in the breeding gene pool can still make excellent family pets. If you are offered a puppy without papers, it may not have been bred by a registered breeder either at all or an ethical breeder that complies with Dogs Queensland rules. Beware! All pedigree puppies in Queensland should be sold with registration papers.

It is required by legislation right across Australia that all dogs and puppies sold must be microchipped before leaving the breeder. Ensure that the microchip paperwork is completed and transferred into your name so that your dog can be returned to you should it ever go missing.

Dog relatives

If possible, always arrange to view the sire, dam and any siblings

and close relatives so you can assess temperament, conformity to the breed standard, and overall health and well-being of any bloodlines you are about to invest your heart (and money) into.

Choosing a Sire

Whether you intend to use a natural stud service or artificial insemination with chilled or frozen semen, it is important that you thoroughly investigate the proposed sire. Check that the pedigree and breed type is complementary to your female.

Check that the sire conforms to the breed standard and that full health test results are available such as hip scores, elbow scores and yearly eye tests. Ask for photos, videos, official show critiques, and copies of health certificates. Also make sure to ask about any progeny and possible heritable problems in the bloodlines and other progeny.

Ensure that you and the stud dog owner are both current financial members of your state canine councils and that you have a current breeders prefix. Make wise breeding decisions after plenty of research so that every litter is aiming to better the breed in every aspect.

If you have read this far into the article, you are obviously keen to know more about this breed. Thank you for choosing to consider a Belgian Shepherd Dog to be your new family member!

The Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld is happy to assist with all breed related inquiries, and is also happy to put you in touch with member breeders who uphold the club's strict health testing guidelines for their breeding stock.

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Finally, we strongly recommend that you join the Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld Inc and through the club, make contact with other Belgian Shepherd Dog fanciers and breeders, who will be only too happy to assist and advise.

The club offers its member breeders complimentary membership to each puppy buyer for the remainder of the club's financial year. Ask your breeder to sign you up, consider it a 'try before you buy' promotion, and if you like our goals, newsletters and Fun days, you are welcome to pay the membership fee to become a fully-fledged member with full voting rights.

Forward any inquiries to:
BSDCQ Secretary, P.O. Box 69, Rosewood 4340
Ph: 0409 619 327

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From then to now

Dogs Queensland Exclusive

Written by Lynda Trotter

The Belgian Shepherd Dog has come a long way as a breed since I obtained my first Groenendael in 1980. Firstly we no longer use the English Standard, as we did then. This standard contained things such as 'wary of strangers' (which people all too often translated as 'timid') as well as not having any methodology for assessing missing teeth. We now have the FCI standard which helps us to maintain breed type in keeping with the country of origin.

Over the years I have been what could be considered a 'fringe dweller' when it comes to performance activities in BelgiansShepherd Dogs. My main focus is breeding and exhibiting, but I have always had an interest in maintaining the ability of the breed to do what it was originally designed to do, herd and/or guard.

Whether the task was to guard and herd sheep (all varieties) guard the flaxen fields (predominantly the Laekenois) or to a smaller degree as Police Dogs (predominantly the Malinois). I have trained and trailed in both Obedience and basic Herding. I have also trained at BH level for a short time in Schutzhund and imported dogs with IPO titles.

Dogs I have owned have successfully competed at Obedience and Agility, and dogs that I have bred have achieved success in Agility, Obedience, Herding, Tracking, Dances with Dogs, Rally O, Endurance and many other and varied performance sports. I can honestly say that the temperament of the Belgian Shepherd Dog is much better today than it was when I first came into the breed.

That is not to say that there were no sound dogs back then, but there are more breeders now, more Belgian Shepherd Dogs registered and many, many more breeders and owners out there participating in various activities with their dogs. The fact that there are many more examples of the breed involved in performance activities is not only due to the fact that there are more options available to us, but also because the word is getting out about this breed.

No longer is the Belgian Shepherd Dog a 'well-kept secret', known only to a chosen few. More and more people are actively searching for Belgian Shepherd Dog litters with parents that have a proven drive and ability for their next Agility/Obedience/Dances with Dogs/Tracking/Rally O/Delta Dog/IPO or Endurance dog. They are also highly sought after here and around the world as search and rescue dogs. We have examples as assistance dogs and also success as seeing eye dogs. As breeders, it is our role to maintain all aspects of the standard. The functional ability, temperament and conformity to type.