

German Shepherds - The facts every owner should know

Also known as the Alsatian, the German Shepherd is a 'young' breed, having only been recognized as a distinct breed in the last 90 years. The German Shepherd can trace its roots back to a range of shepherding dogs in Germany, and some groups tried to informally breed this dog. This effort failed but in 1899, a new group formed. Der Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde was founded by Max von Stephanitz, who wanted to breed an all purpose working dog.

The German Shepherd came to the United States in 1908 with soldiers impressed by the courage and abilities of this dog. German Shepherds will reach an average height of 22 to 26 inches, weight of 77 to 85 pounds and live an average of 13 years. There are a wide variety of coats in this breed. Some German Shepherds are longhaired and some are shorthaired. The color is most often black and tan, but can also be sable, all black, blue and liver and white.

The one thing all German Shepherd coats have in common is that they shed profusely, and shed worse during their shedding season. Daily brushing usually helps combat the shedding, and German Shepherds should only be bathed occasionally. Almost all German Shepherds are described as self-confident and loyal.

German Shepherds are highly intelligent and often times used as police dogs, rescue dogs and guide dogs. German Shepherds make excellent guard dogs and are very loyal to their family. They make excellent protectors, barking when someone unfamiliar is approaching. German Shepherds do make good family pets and will guard the children of 'their' family. They will tolerate the poking and prodding children are prone to do. However, they are sometimes unaware of their size and power relative to a small child and may indiscriminately knock them over.

A German Shepherd and child should always be watched to avoid this. German Shepherds can survive apartment living if given enough exercise regularly and given enough activities. If left alone too long or not stimulated enough, German Shepherds will become bored and destructive. They enjoy being in the company of their human family but not other pets. As a working dog that likes to please, a German Shepherd will do very well with obedience training. German Shepherds are prone to some genetic disorders including hip and elbow Dysplasia, blood disorders, digestive problems, epilepsy, chronic eczema, keratitis (inflammation of the cornea), dwarfism and flea allergies.