

Getting to Know German Shepherds

by
Lisa Mantellato

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Getting to Know German Shepherds is over 190 pages filled with easy reading current information with over 200 colour images and embedded video files. An extensive list of on-line resources is provided for further reading.

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Getting to Know German Shepherds

A Guide to Choosing and Owning a
German Shepherd Dog

LISA MANTELLATO

Animalinfo

Publications

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History of the German Shepherd Dog



Utility is the true criterion of beauty.

Max von Stephanitz, founder of the German Shepherd Dog breed.



Max von Stephanitz - Gründer des SV
„Sein Geist genahmt zur Treue“

*Max von Stephanitz
Founder of the German Shepherd Breed*

*Image Top - Horand von Grafrath
The first entry in the German Shepherd
stud book.*

Dogs have been used to herd and protect sheep and other livestock from predators such as wolves for thousands of years. Down through the centuries these dogs developed the ability and instinct to work all day protecting and herding stock, and they quickly became indispensable, faithful companions to man. In the 1800's Germany had a number of working sheepdogs generally grouped as German Sheepdogs. At this time there was no true German Shepherd, but a large variety of dogs with varying colour and coat types.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a young Cavalry Captain, Max von Stephanitz, thought of breeding a sheep dog to type; of medium size, high intelligence, noble in appearance, physically able to work all day, trustworthy of character and with an innate sense to please. Throughout the 1890's he experimented with breeding dogs, utilising many of the ideas of the English dog breeders of the time. In 1899, von Stephanitz and some of his friends formed the Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde or "SV" and the establishment of the German Shepherd as a breed was formalised. In theory, any working dog could be registered, but in practice, certain characteristics soon

Description of the Breed



'Their impression of power is remarkable. They give one the feeling of immense reserves of energy, of great reservoirs of knowledge, of tolerance, of disposition, obstinacy of purpose, and tenacity of principle. They are responsive, and they have a lot of quiet, good sense'. – Wentworth Day, from "The Dog in Sport" 1938.

Physical Appearance



*'Australian Champion
Orpheus vd Kräuterwiese' (Imp Germany)
KKI.1 SchH3 'a' ED Excellent Select
Photo – Vicki Knight*

Generally speaking, a well bred and raised German Shepherd is obviously intelligent, poised, agile, solid and strong, but not bulky. It is balanced, alert and full of life. The tail is bushy with a moderate upward curve and never docked. The ears are in proportion with the head and are pointed. It is longer than it is tall, and the shoulders (withers) should not be lower than the hip. The length is not in the back, which is relatively short, strong and straight, but in the overall structure of the dog. The shoulders, back and croup make up the top line and they should flow from one to the other with out any breaks. The desired top line is a gentle, flowing line from the tip of the ears to the tip of the tail. Movement will show any faults in the top line.

*Top – 'Australian Champion LaShadas
Pizzaz' Bscl.1 A Z Ex. Merit
Photo – Bruvic German Shepherds*



Sable puppies are much lighter than black and tan puppies.

rare. In sables, each hair has a dark tip giving the dog an overall greyish appearance, though the areas that are tan in a black and tan dog can be much lighter and more gold than the rest of the coat. As gold sables mature, the darker areas can become so dark, and the gold areas so light, that they can be difficult for the inexperienced to distinguish from black and tan dogs. The sable undercoat however, always remains light so parting the dogs coat will confirm the sable colour.



Parting the coat of a Sable reveals a light undercoat even after the dog has matured.



*5 month old grey sable
'Friedental Colas Luke'
Photo – Vicki Knight*

be judged against these standard features that describe 'perfection' for the breed. These features will include descriptions of colour, body shape, size, temperament and gait, and can be very specific in their requirements.

This description of 'perfection' is known as the 'Breed Standard' and it can sometimes vary slightly from country to country. Links to the Breed Standards for German Shepherd Dogs from the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC), the American Kennel Club (AKC), the Kennel Club UK, the Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC), the New Zealand Kennel Club (NZKC) and the World Canine Association (FCI) are included in the 'Resources' section at the end of the book.



A judge examines 'Iccara Ashanti Alleycat' for correct teeth alignment.



Candy Baker campaigns 'Australian Champion Friedental Colas Sparkle' Bsc1.1 A Z Ex. Merit at the 2008 Perth Royal Show.

A dog that aligns closely to the 'Breed Standard' will probably be quite costly to purchase, as a great deal of time and expense will have been put in to selectively breeding dogs from champion animals. If showing is to be a passion for you, then it will be worthwhile investing the time to talk to prospective German Shepherd breeders about the genetics and show quality of their stock, and then be prepared to pay for the quality of dog you end up purchasing. However, if you want a German Shepherd as a companion only, then purchasing an animal that doesn't quite

problems. A rescued Shepherd may scratch doors, howl etc during the settling in period. You must be prepared for this.

- The dog may take some time to learn to trust you and transfer its loyalty to you as a new owner.
- Do you have children or other pets? Any new dog with an unknown background should be closely monitored.
- Have you experience with the breed previously?

If you have addressed all of these issues and believe you can meet a rescued German Shepherd's needs then contact a rescue organisation and discuss it with them. It can be extremely rewarding to be able to provide an abandoned and possibly abused animal with a safe and loving home. However it can be a long and difficult process and you may need more than the average level of dog handling skills, compassion and commitment. A responsible rescue service should allow you and your rescued Shepherd a trial period to see if you're suited. Check this with them before taking a dog home. See page 83 for advice on introducing an adult dog to your home.



Providing a good home for an older dog that needs one can be a rewarding experience.

Visual Examination

When purchasing a German Shepherd puppy, it is best to do your homework on the potential suppliers before going to look at litters. Puppies are so difficult to resist even if they do not appear perfectly healthy or as well developed as they should be for their age. If you identify breeders beforehand, you will have the opportunity to visit a number of them and decide on which line of breeding you prefer in areas such as temperament, outlook, attitude and conformation, colour, markings and coat length. You can also confirm that the parents have all the health and breed credentials already mentioned. In addition, you can get an idea of how well they care for their dogs, how clean their establishment and their adult dogs are, and how ethical they are in their breeding activities.



All puppies are cute! It's best to identify good breeders before looking at litters.

Bear in mind that some mothers are more protective than others when they are raising a litter. This is quite normal and naturally instinctive so they may need to

in the day, because it won't understand. You can only correct things at the time they are happening. If you don't want them to do something, you need to make sure that

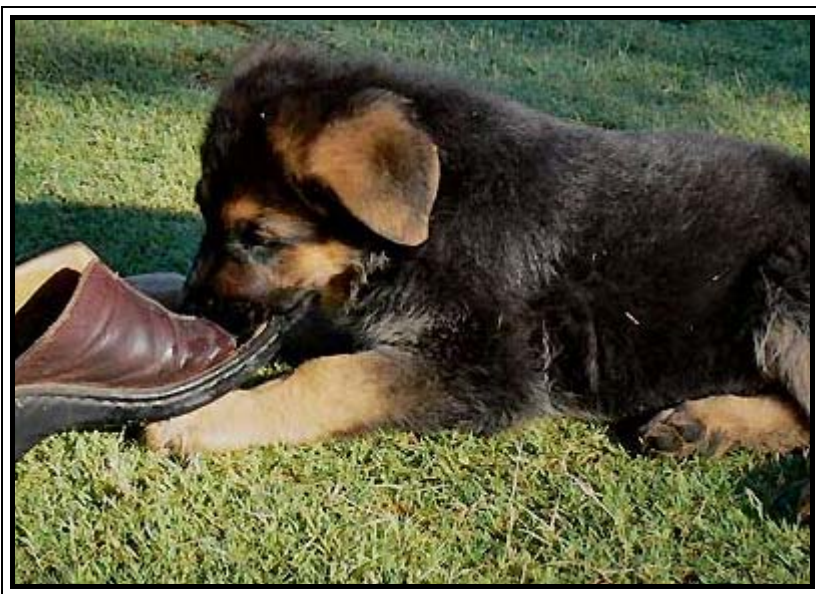


*Be consistent! If you don't want your dog on the furniture when they are older, don't let them get up when they are a puppy.
Photo – Bruvic German Shepherds*

they are always corrected each and every time they perform this behaviour. If you can't be bothered, they will not understand why they can do something sometimes, and not others. For instance, if you don't want them to jump on the furniture you must remove them from the furniture as soon as they jump up with a firm 'NO'. It is preferable to give the 'NO' command as they are attempting to get onto the furniture. Correction should not be any more physical

than firm verbal commands and making the behaviour happen such as lifting them down from the furniture while saying -'GET DOWN'. In future, if the pup responds quickly to the verbal command and ceases trying to get on the furniture, or gets down as soon as it is asked, it should be rewarded with much praise and attention.

If they chew on your shoes, again use a firm 'NO' but in this instance it is also beneficial to offer the pup one of its toys as well. In this way the pup learns that some things are out of bounds, but it can do what it wants with its own toys. You can't expect them not to exhibit normal puppy behaviour such as chewing, particularly



If they chew on your shoes use a firm 'NO' but offer the pup one of its toys instead.

from country to country depending on what infectious diseases are common to the area where the pup was bred. Regardless of which diseases the vaccination protects against, the first vaccination provides only partial immunity, designed to bolster the pup's maternal immunity. Because of this, puppies should not be taken to public open places where unvaccinated dogs may have been, until at least a week after their second vaccination at ten to twelve weeks of age. Although it is important to socialise your puppy between eight and twelve weeks of age with both people and other dogs, the risks may outweigh the benefits. You may consider visiting friends that have fully vaccinated dogs or restricting socialisation to human interactions until after your pup is fully vaccinated.

I have already mentioned the need to make sure that your yard is secure to prevent the puppy escaping into potentially hazardous environments. It is also important to check the yard itself for potential threats. These include making sure that your puppy can't drown in the backyard pool, or knock over large objects that it may crash into when playing. You should also make sure that there is no access to potentially toxic products that may be in the garden or shed such as snail pellets, rodent bait, engine coolant, and fertiliser.

The desire to chew and swallow inappropriate objects is also a concern. Electrical cords should be kept out of reach both inside and outside the house. Small objects and toys that are too small for the type of pup you have may be swallowed and result in a bowel obstruction or cause the puppy to choke. Make sure that the toys provided are robust enough to withstand chewing so that they don't break into pieces small enough to swallow.



The desire to chew and swallow inappropriate items may also be a problem

Hazards associated with the environment such as poisonous snakes, spiders, paralysis ticks, and poisonous toads may vary according to where live. Your vet or state kennel council can advise you on things that may pose a threat in your area. They are just like children in many ways and therefore a commonsense approach is required. You wouldn't leave a child in a hot car and the same applies to dogs. A couple of days of close observation will help you identify potential hazards. Rather than becoming alarmed or paranoid about your puppy's safety, simply be aware of what your pup is doing when it is awake and playing.



Make sure that the toys provided are robust enough to withstand chewing so that they don't break into pieces small enough to swallow.

Exercise and play

The German Shepherd Dog is a fast growing breed so strain on the skeletal structure from over exercising when young, can cause permanent damage to developing bones and joints. Moderation is the key to a healthy, fit and long-lived dog. Doing too much too soon will only impair your dogs health. EVERYTHING should be in moderation in rapidly growing large breed pups. Limit free running with other dogs, especially those bigger and more agile. Retrieving games also need to be limited and no jumping until 12 months of age. Even jumping in or out of the family car is not recommended. Some surfaces are detrimental to growing puppies too. Shiny, slippery surfaces need extra special care. Keep the puppy off these as much as possible and definitely no fast movement or games on slippery surfaces. It is preferable to keep the puppy on firm/grassy surfaces as much as possible. Playing is better on soft, sandy surfaces to absorb some of the 'joint shock' that even the gentle playtimes can induce.

done on carcasses have also shown that wolves have died of bowel perforations caused by fowl bones and frequently have serious dental problems. Supplementation of bones and raw food diets is highly recommended to help ensure a balanced diet. Fresh food diets containing cooked meat, grains, and vegetables enjoy far greater acceptance by vets. Cooking helps eliminate parasites and bacteria that may cause illness in your dog and helps the dog digest and utilise the nutrients in grain and fresh vegetables.

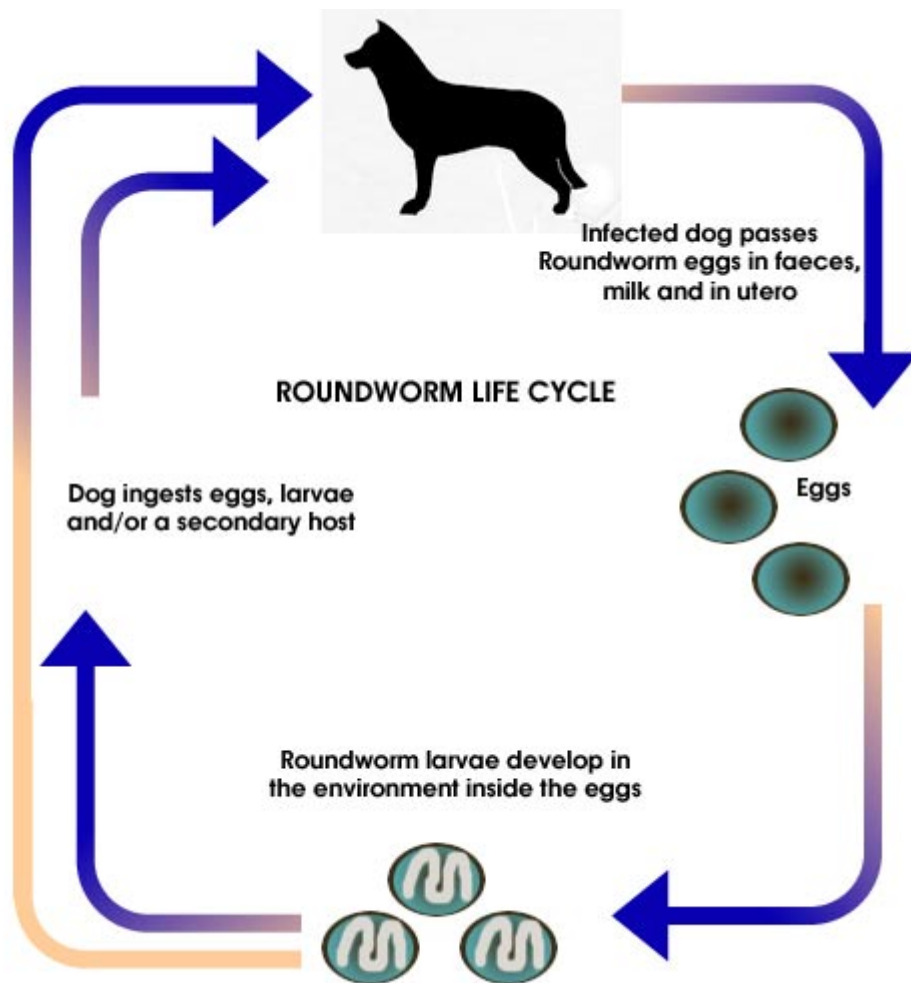
There are some excellent dietary alternatives to feeding a dry food diet. The only requirement is some solid research into the diet, the time needed to prepare the diet, and preferably some consultation with your vet on the pros and cons of the diet you are proposing to use. A feeding trial is also recommended but you need to allow at least six weeks, preferably more, to adequately assess the effects of the diet. Unfortunately, some serious consequences of nutritional deficiencies can take much longer to become apparent. There can also be serious consequences resulting from the excessive intake of some nutrients, hence the importance of consulting with your vet before making any radical dietary decisions.

Whether or not you feed primarily dry food, cooked food, raw food, or a combination of both, bones in moderation are a welcome addition to your dog's diet. Although dry diets are considered to have an abrasive effect on teeth, helping to prevent tartar build up, gingivitis, and periodontal disease, a good bone to chew on will always be enjoyed and also help to exercise the gums and remove tartar. Feed raw bones only, as cooked ones may splinter causing damage ranging from minor cuts to the gums and mouth, to perforated intestines, as mentioned earlier, causing death. Chicken necks and wings are



Bones in moderation are a welcome addition to your dog's diet, helping to exercise the gums and remove tartar.

good for smaller dogs, ranging through ribs, neck bones, shanks and long leg bones from sheep and cows for the bigger dogs. Feeding large marrow bones can be beneficial, as many dogs do not have the strength to break the bone into small pieces. However, some dogs will continue to grind away at bones, ingesting small amounts that can still cause digestive problems, while some large dogs can break and swallow large pieces.



Hookworms (*Ancylostoma caninum*, *Ancylostoma braziliense*)

Heavy burdens of most intestinal worms can cause serious illness in your dog and hookworm, in particular, can cause death in young pups due to blood loss. Unlike other intestinal worms that absorb nutrients from food passing through the digestive system, hookworms suck blood directly from their host. Like roundworms they have an environmental stage in their lifecycle and they can also migrate in the body, infecting the lungs and mammary glands as well as unborn puppies.

Hookworm eggs are passed into the environment through the droppings of infected dogs. The eggs hatch in the soil and complete two further stages of their lifecycle before being able to infect another host. They do this in two ways- either by being licked up by a dog whose coat has been contaminated with soil carrying larvae, or by worms directly penetrating the skin when larvae come in contact with a potential host. It is important to note that worms may infect humans in this manner so children playing in areas where hookworm larvae are present are at risk of becoming infected, particularly through the soles of their feet.

Once the larvae are inside a new host they generally migrate to the intestine to complete their lifecycle. Some however, migrate to other areas in the same manner as roundworms, infecting the lungs and trachea. Like roundworms they are eventually coughed up and swallowed, allowing them to complete the reproductive

lots of positive reinforcement training, this need not be traumatic. It is important not to make it a negative experience, resulting in resentment, as there are other alternatives if your dog strongly objects to brushing. Only edible toothpaste, especially made for dogs should be used with either a special dog toothbrush or a finger brush. Human toothpaste is not meant to be swallowed but it is unlikely that even the cleverest dog will master the rinse and spit procedure needed with human toothpaste. Most vet nurses or technicians will happily spend some time with you demonstrating how to brush your dog's teeth, usually as part of the 'over the counter service'.



Teeth that are allowed to become encrusted with tartar and gums that become inflamed, are painful and result in bad breath, inappetence, and can eventually lead to serious health issues



Healthy white teeth and clean pink gums in a young German Shepherd Dog

Once plaques have developed into hard brown tartar deposits they can no longer be removed by brushing but early intervention by a veterinarian can help remove these before more serious damage to the teeth occurs and infection results. Signs of early

German Shepherd Health Issues



*Purchasing a healthy puppy from a reputable breeder
can help ensure that you will have a long
and happy relationship with your dog.*

Photo – Bruvic German Shepherds

Just as humans suffer from a seemingly infinite number of health problems, so too do dogs. However, instead of rewriting the veterinary journals here, I have included a list of those health problems which are most specific to German Shepherd Dogs, and which are most important for you, as an owner or potential buyer, to know about. Some of the problems can be very serious but you should remember that they are 'potential' problems only, and that the risk of your dog developing them can be reduced dramatically by being careful where you obtain your dog from, and by also providing the right diet and exercise. It is vital that a high quality feeding regime is adopted from the start. German shepherds can have digestive problems so it is important to find a quality food that your dog likes and one that doesn't upset the digestion. If in doubt ask your vet for advice.

How is it treated?

Unfortunately there is no cure for hip dysplasia, however you can help to manage the pain and slow the progression of degenerative joint disease by a combination of drug therapy, exercise modification and weight control.

It is also important that young German Shepherds not be allowed to grow faster than their bones, muscles and ligaments can cope with. The extra strain that an overweight puppy will put on newly developing joints may be enough to begin the early onset of hip dysplasia symptoms.

Dogs with severe hip dysplasia may benefit from surgery. Surgical options are expensive but may provide good results. This is a serious condition and one that will require extensive commitment from you and your veterinarian to manage.

How can you avoid buying a dog with hip dysplasia?

Hip dysplasia is most commonly an inherited disease, caused by the actions of many different genes (polygenic). Unfortunately however, there is no simple DNA-based test to determine whether a particular dog is carrying the combination of genes that will cause it to either exhibit or pass on the defect. Another complication in assessing the hip status of a puppy is that hip dysplasia cannot generally be reliably detected until a dog reaches 1 – 2 years of age. Therefore,



Above – Normal Canine Hips



*Above – Bi-lateral Hip Dysplasia
Photos – Dr Joel Mills*



Activity and puzzle toys may help to keep your dog busy and quiet while you are away from home.



Remember, some squeaky toys can be as annoying to neighbours as barking.

problem. Due to the fact that their dog is not noisy when they are home, many people will not acknowledge their neighbour's complaints. It is important to keep communication open with your neighbours to avoid animosity. Voice activated recorders are a simple way of determining how bad the barking problem is after you have left the property.

Barking may be attention seeking or result from the dog's natural desire to protect its territory. Well socialised dogs that are used to lots of people, noises, and other animals may be less likely to become alarm barkers, inclined to bark at the slightest disturbance. It may also result from boredom, frustration, indecision, and separation anxiety when their owner is away from home. Sometimes it can result from health issues, particularly in older dogs. Providing enrichment for your dog in the form of activity toys can be helpful in occupying them. But remember, some noisy 'squeaky' toys can be as annoying as barking! Puzzle toys and 'Kongs™' allow you to hide treats inside. Retrieving the treats can occupy a dog for long periods so they may be a better choice. It is important to make sure that toys are the appropriate size for your dog so they are not at risk from choking while you are away. Getting them used to being outside on their own while you are home can avoid