

THE PYRENEAN SHEPHERD

The Pyrenean Shepherd is a small herding breed from France, which originated in the rugged Pyrénées Mountains that straddle the border of France and Spain. Known as the Berger des Pyrénées in its homeland, it herded sheep high in the mountains, while its counterpart the Great Pyrenees guarded the flocks.

A lively and vivacious breed who works tirelessly, their small size and alert character were well suited to working high in the mountains. Because these dogs worked together with the Great Pyrenees they did not need to fulfill a dual role of both herding dog and protector as many herding breeds do. This allowed for their small stature, which gave them the agility they needed for working in such rugged terrain and which also allowed the shepherds to keep more dogs, hence allowing them to keep more sheep. These dogs were both capable of making decisions on their own, and taking directions when needed; characteristics that the breed still retains today.

While the breed was generally unknown outside of the Pyrénées until after WW I (where it distinguished itself for its service in the war), they had been established in the region for centuries. After the war the Réunion des Amateurs des Pyrénées (RACP) was created in France to both preserve and protect the two Pyrenean breeds. The Pyrenean Shepherd was later granted full recognition in France in 1926.

It is likely that the first Pyr Sheps came to the US with flocks of sheep in the 18th – 19th centuries (some of which may have been influential in developing the Australian Shepherd). The first verified imports to the US were several dogs imported by Great Pyrenees breeder Mary Crane (Basquaerie), though none of these dogs were ever bred. In the 1970's another Great Pyrenees breeder Linda Weisser imported a pair of Pyr Sheps that were bred, and in the 1980's Patricia Princehouse also imported additional breeding stock. In 1987 the Pyrenean Shepherd Club of America was founded by fanciers of the breed to preserve and protect the breed in the US. In 2009 the breed was granted full recognition by the AKC and may participate in both conformation and all performance events, including herding.

Because of their background, Pyr Sheps are an active breed, and need lots of exercise and activity. This is an intelligent breed that needs a job to do. They are also extremely connected with their owners and love to be involved with their owner's everyday life. The Pyr Shep's natural inclination is to be a one person - one family dog, and proper socialization is needed to develop a well-rounded individual.

Pyr Sheps are a very natural breed, and require limited grooming, even for the show ring. They come in both Smooth-Faced and Rough-Faced varieties; with the Rough-Faced variety also coming in two coat lengths: long and demi-long. While Smooth-Faced and demi-long Rough-Faced coats are easy to care for, most long coated dogs will naturally form cords, which can easily become matted if not attended to. An occasional brushing is needed to either keep the coat cord and mat free, or maintenance of the cords is required.

Overall Pyr Sheps are a very healthy breed, and are very long lived (often 15-17 years). The Pyrenean Shepherd Club of America (PSCA) recommends that all dogs being bred should be screened for: hip dysplasia (OFA, PennHip or OVC), inheritable eye defects (CERF), patellar subluxation (OFA), and hereditary cardiac issues (OFA). Puppies should also be vet checked, and have an eye clearance (CERF) as well before going to their new homes.

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