

Pyrenean Shepherd – March 2009 Gazette
A WELL KEPT SECRET

The smallest of the French herding breeds, the Pyrenean Shepherd (*or Berger des Pyrénées as it is known in France*), is one of the most well kept secrets in the dog world. Unlike many herding breeds whose origin can be traced to the British Isles or other parts of mainland Europe, this little breed of sheep dog developed in virtual isolation in the rugged High Pyrenees Mountains of France. They were, and still are, used by the shepherds there to herd sheep; working with their partners, the Great Pyrenees, who guard the sheep.

Pyr Sheps are relative newcomers to the AKC, but this breed has a long history going back many centuries or possibly millennia. Images of them can be found in medieval tapestries, engravings from the 1700 and 1800s, and in many old photographs from the early 20th century with breed type clearly identifiable. This well kept secret is no longer a secret though, as they have taken the agility world (as well as other performance venues) by storm, and will no doubt do the same in the conformation ring.

To understand the Pyr Shep more fully we look to some phrases from the breed standard:

“A small, sinewy, lean, lively dog...”

When people meet them for the first time, they are often surprised at the small size of the breed - standing only 15 - 21" tall. Don't be fooled by their size, or their charming, scruffy faces though - they possess a lot of energy in a small package, and are independent, hard working little dogs, which are extremely intelligent and devoted.

“... whose sparkling personality and quicksilver intelligence are reflected in the vibrant expression...”

A Pyr Shep's intelligence makes him a dog who thinks about every situation, and also makes him the versatile dog that he is - capable of herding livestock, navigating agility courses, doing tracking, and many other tasks.

“...his high energy and intelligent, cunning, mischievous attitude show that he is always on alert, suspicious, ready for action. “

Pyr Sheps have their own unique and complex personality, and are quite unlike any other dog. They are always looking for a task to do and are happiest when given one.

“An ardent herder of all kinds of livestock...”

Pyr Shep's still have very strong herding instincts and are very tenacious. This is the result of breeding dogs for generations that were capable of working tirelessly herding sheep in very rugged difficult terrain, with both the ability to think on their own, and take directions.

“...naturally distrustful of strangers, but when well-socialized from a young age, he or she has a very lively, cheerful disposition.”

Pyr Sheps are extremely connected with their owners, and love to be involved in their lives. While being extremely devoted to their masters, they can be inclined not to be very open minded with strangers, making proper socialization vital. This tradition characteristic is important for judges to understand as well.

If you are interested in learning more about this well kept secret we recommend contacting the parent club at: www.pyrshep.com.

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