

NORTHERN BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG CLUB

Breed Information Sheet

This may give you some “*food for thought*” before deciding on a Bernese Mountain Dog as a new companion:

Please remember this breed is not for everyone, so if you are considering owning a Bernese, you should research the breed thoroughly. You should look for a responsible breeder who has been involved with the breed for some time and who has built up a knowledge of Bernese through living with and owning them. The breed is not without its problems and a responsible breeder should offer support and advice to new owners at all times. Please think long and hard before owning any breed of dog.

Bernese Mountain Dogs or Berner Sennenhund as they are known in Switzerland, are a native breed of that country. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the main centre for breeding was in the Bernese Oberland, a mountainous area. Now the breed is bred in all areas of Switzerland as well as Belgium, France, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, America, Scandinavia and Great Britain as well as in Australia and New Zealand. At a conference on the breed held in Switzerland a couple of years ago, there were 25 countries represented showing the widespread nature of the breed.

In Switzerland the breed is still used as an all-purpose farm dog and occasionally as a draught dog to pull the small milk carts and weavers carts. Carting as a hobby is undertaken in other countries including Great Britain, and there are various carting groups who regularly attend events with their dogs, enjoying their hobby whilst raising money for charities.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the breed was quite scarce. Thanks largely to the efforts of Professor Heim (the father of the breed), Bernese Mountain Dogs as we know them have survived. He came upon some fine specimens in the Durrbach area and started the breeding programme with them. He was an intelligent man who, in the early days of the breed, warned against any exaggeration. Every child's idea of a perfect dog was what he set out to create. We think he succeeded!

Some Bernese came into Britain in 1936. A small amount of breeding did occur, but the outbreak of World War Two caused the breed to die out at that time and they were not reintroduced to these shores until 1969 when two bitches and one male were imported from Switzerland. From those early beginnings the breed has grown in this country to the point where about 800+ Bernese are registered annually with the Kennel Club.

Bernese are now rapidly becoming very popular with the general public and are sought as companion animals. The very attractive tricolour markings of black, white and rich tan make the Bernese Mountain Dog one of the most strikingly handsome of dogs.

They are not a giant breed, although they are above average in size and weight. The standard calls for dogs of above middle size, so one must visualise a dog somewhat heavier and larger than a Golden Retriever. They can be lively, energetic and full of fun, but can also be inclined to be stubborn and wilful. On the whole, they should want to please their owners and many are relatively easy to train. They are very attached to their owners and families and make ideal family dogs and companions as well as excellent watchdogs. They love being outdoors, but do not make good kennel dogs as they prefer to be with their owners, whatever the weather and are best when exposed to large amounts of human companionship. They need a moderate amount of exercise, but are also happy pottering in and out all day, provided there is plenty of contact with their owner.

As a large dog, the appearance is quite breathtaking and whilst they will bark at approaching strangers, in temperament they should be quiet and calm, no unnecessary hysterical barking and hyperactivity. Bernese should be at peace with other animals and are not naturally aggressive towards puppies, cats, kittens and other livestock. However, the character will depend upon how the owner socialises his/her dog. Early socialisation and training is essential and beneficial for all puppies.

Bernese are slow to mature and need limited exercise during the first twelve months. They are quite greedy with food and should never be allowed to become overweight and fat. In training, they will respond well to rewards of an edible nature. They should be fed a high quality diet and during the growing stage they require plenty of rest.

They are a complicated and specialist breed needing plenty of attention and companionship. They can have orthopaedic problems during their life, as well as problems with skin and ears. They are long coated and thus need regular grooming which should be established early in life to prevent coat problems later. The breed is prone to cancer and although individuals can live to a ripe old age, the average length of life is around 7 years.

We hope this has given you some insight into the Bernese Mountain Dog.