

Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Information Booklet



Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Canada



Thank you for expressing an interest in our wonderful Bernese Mountain Dogs. We will be happy to respond to any questions you may have about these beautiful dogs.

This pamphlet contains some information on the breed and our club. Hopefully you will be able to find the information you are looking for on the following pages, if not, please don't hesitate to contact us. There is a complete list of the club executive and their email addresses on: **www.bmdcc.ca**. You can also send us a message via our Facebook page: **www.facebook.com/BMDCC**



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG



The Bernese Mountain Dog is a large working dog of Swiss origin. Striking and distinctive in appearance, he is, all the same, a totally natural unexaggerated dog. He is hardy, loyal, and eager to please - an ideal companion dog.

The Swiss name for the breed is Berner Sennenhund or Bouvier Bernois. The canton of Bern is where these dogs were originally principally found. They were used to pull the carts of dairy farmers and basket weavers, and served as companions and guardians on the farms. They were affectionately called “Four Eyes” and “Yellow Cheeks” and other names descriptive of their

typical markings. European art shows Bernese type dogs existing centuries ago, but until the early 1900’s the large tricoloured dogs were a variety of farm dog, rather than a distinct breed.

The coat of the Bernese Mountain Dog is of medium length, soft and often wavy, but not curly. It is primarily black. There must be a white blaze and muzzle band, and white chest marking which preferably takes the shape of a cross. Other preferred markings are white feet and a white tail tip. There must be rust, or dark tan, markings on the cheeks, above the eyes, on the legs between the black and the white, and on the side of the chest.

A long history as a working dog and companion gives the Berner instinctive good manners and makes him highly trainable. Harsh training methods are never recommended, and indeed are not necessary. The beautiful coat is largely self-cleaning and usually only requires brushing, appropriate to the season to keep it clean and neat.

Without a doubt, the temperament of this breed is its greatest attribute, but a Bernese Mountain Dog’s personality will only fully develop with adequate socialization and ample human companionship. Typically the Bernese forms strong attachments to the human family and is often suspicious of strangers, but should never be vicious nor shy.



Individual variations in type and temperament of the dog will depend upon the individual characteristics, heredity and environmental factors. A well raised and well cared for puppy should be a loyal and devoted family member. Maximum life expectancy is 10 to 13 years with 7 to 8 being the average.

So, You Want A Bernese Mountain Dog?

Although initially Berners may seem to be the ideal pet, there are some **DISADVANTAGES!** Listed below are the many areas that need thought and consideration before you bring one into your home:



SIZE...Berners are large dogs. Males range from 59-69 cm (24-28") at the shoulder and weigh from 39-55 kg (85-120 lbs) . Females stand 56-66 cm (23-26") and weigh 30-45 kg (65-100 lbs). They normally possess extremely active tails, making a clean sweep of a coffee table.

EXERCISE...While Berners are not normally a hyper breed, they do require daily exercise to keep fit and adjust to the role of a calm house pet most people desire.

SHEDDING...They are a long-coated breed and shed a minimum of twice a year. This "blowing of coat" will result in more than the occasional dog hair in the butter or on the furniture, and large hair bunnies rolling across the floor. If you are fastidious in the home **DO NOT GET A BERNESE!** A good thorough brushing everyday during this molt is beneficial. **THIS IS NOT AN IDEAL BREED FOR ALLERGY PRONE INDIVIDUALS.**

HEALTH & CARE... As in any large breed, hip and elbow dysplasia are a concern to all Berner owners. Purchasing a puppy whose parents have been certified to be free from dysplasia will better your chances of having a strong and capable pup. Cancer is also a serious issue for the breed. There are several forms of cancer that are known to affect the breed and unfortunately can result in death occurring at very early age. Eye conditions that may occur in Bernese include cataracts, entropion (rolling in of the eyelid), and PRA (Progressive Retinal Atrophy). Other health problems that Bernese owner may have to deal with include: allergies, bloat, thyroid, epilepsy, heart conditions, and degenerative myelopathy (DM). While some Berners will not develop any of the listed health problems, we feel that it is best for you to know the worst. For more information on health issues see the club website www.bmdcc.ca.



MAINTENANCE COSTS... Feeding one dog for a year will run approximately \$600 - \$1,900 depending on the type of food you choose. Veterinary expenses for the first year (puppy) run between \$200 - \$600 depending on the veterinarian and the locale. Though many of these expenses get hidden in the grocery bill (food, dishes, collars, leashes, brushes, shampoos, toys, etc) **THEY ARE THERE!** (**Please note:** The Veterinary costs quoted are for a healthy puppy. One that needs surgery to correct hip dysplasia or another serious conditions can run up thousands of dollars. For this reason, it is a good idea to take out a Pet Health Care Insurance policy on your puppy for at least the first two years of its life, to offset any large medical expenses).



TRAINING... Many wish to make their Berners into good canine citizens. A good beginner's course costs approximately \$120. Berners tend to be sensitive or soft in many training situations and must be handled carefully, with a loving, firm but nonetheless GENTLE hand. Bernese respond well to positive training techniques using food, toys, and praise. Training for a dog this size is a must. **GUARD DOG...** Though they may bark and possibly growl defensively, when it comes down to brass tacks they'd as soon kiss the intruder and show him the silver as opposed to saving the family's wealth, but they can be protective towards family members especially children. If you are looking for a vicious guard dog - look for another breed.



ADDICTIVE... Much like potato chips, you can't have just one! Very few people own just one Berner. We simply find them habit forming. Contrary to popular opinion, they are not cheaper by the dozen and two Berners cannot live as cheaply as one. If you have two Berners, it will cost you twice as much to feed and so on and so on... If you are still interested, and we hope you still are.....

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**WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF
BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG ADMIRERS !!**

Where to Purchase Your Bernese

Assuming that you have researched the Bernese Mountain Dog and have come to the conclusion that this is the only breed for you, where do you buy one? While the Bernese Mountain Dog Clubs of Canada, Ontario and Quebec all have a current list of breeders, the clubs in no way endorse or make any recommendation of any name on the list. It is the responsibility of the buyer to research and determine the breeder's reliability. As a member the Canadian Kennel Club we do not sanction the breeding/purchasing of unregistered and/or crossbred Berners. Club members are asked to sell all puppies on CKC non-breeding contracts. This prevents indiscriminate breeding of dogs. When a person breeds a dog it should **only be to improve** this wonderful breed!

DO YOUR HOMEWORK BEFORE YOU BUY. RESEARCH THE BREEDER'S REPUTATION AND AFTER SALES SUPPORT. BE AWARE THAT FLASHY ADVERTISEMENTS AND WEBSITES DO NOT ALWAYS EQUATE TO QUALITY PUPPIES OR GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICES.



What you should expect from a reputable breeder:

- A healthy, happy, and carefully bred puppy. You should be able to see the mother of the puppies as well as the entire litter. Commonly the sire of the litter is not available for viewing as quite often the bitch is sent away to be bred. If you are purchasing a puppy sight unseen, due to distance factors, most kennels will give you the names of people who have purchased puppies previously, as references.

- Complete health record of the puppy. This will include the microchip or tattoo number that the puppy was identified with.
- Certificate of vaccination indicating what type of vaccination was administered and by whom.
- A four generation pedigree.
- Written sales agreement. A reputable kennel will provide you with a contract and/or guarantee (terms vary depending on the individual breeder) when you purchase a puppy. Make sure you fully understand your obligations under the agreement, as well as what the breeder is willing to do for you.
- The puppy's CKC registration should be provided to the owner within 6 months. The breeder should have it stated in the agreement that the puppy will be individually registered with the CKC.
- According to the Animal Pedigree Act of Canada if you are purchasing an animal deemed as purebred you are entitled to the registration papers within 6 months from the time of sale.
- Photocopies of all health certifications for both parents of the puppy. These clearance should include hips, elbows, eyes (as a minimum). Breeders may also screen their breeding dogs for heart, thyroid, vWD (a blood clotting disorder), degenerative myelopathy (DM) and shoulders abnormalities.
- A bill of sale, outlining the purchase price and any conditional sales clauses. This may be included as part of the sales agreement.
- Feeding instructions for the first year of life.
- General training outline for basic obedience and housetraining.
- Communication and support for any problems that may occur throughout the dog's life.
- A life long take back policy for any unwanted puppy they sell. If the breeder is unable or unwilling to supply most or all of the above perhaps you should look further before buying. Above all you should feel completely comfortable with the breeder, as they should feel completely comfortable with you before considering selling you a puppy. Most breeders will ask numerous questions to determine if you would provide the kind of home they want for their puppies. You too should ask many questions.

What a breeder should expect from you.

Any breeder has the right to expect you to:

- Provide proper care and housing for your dog - this means a properly fenced yard or dog run - NOT tied out on a chain/ rope or allowed to run free without supervision.
- Provide regular veterinary checks, care, and vaccinations.
- Provide regular exercise and grooming to keep in top condition.
- Obedience train your dog, even if only to a basic level.
- Properly socialize your dog with people and other animals.
- Adhere to any additional sales clauses agreed to at the time of sale.
- Notify your breeder should you wish to give up your dog, for any reason and give the breeder the first opportunity to take the dog back.
- Give regular updates on the puppies progress and possibly provide some nice photos.



Frequently Asked Questions about Bernese:

Do Bernese Mountain Dogs get along with children?

This depends on the individuals involved – the child, the dog, and perhaps most importantly, the parents. The Bernese is NOT always the best choice of breed for a family with small children. Many Berner puppies go through a “mouthy” stage that can be unwittingly encouraged by young children. Many Berners’ bodies grow faster than their “brains” which can be a challenge to the inexperienced dog owner.



Do Berners get along with dogs or other animals?

Most Bernese puppies will be able to adjust to the other members of their new families – human, canine, feline and other pets. The greater the size difference, the more supervision and training may be required.

Also, much depends on the individuals involved. Some Berners are more nurturing, while others may have a stronger prey drive. The majority are somewhere in the middle and will respond to guidance in regard to their interactions with other family members.

Do Berners have a tendency to wander?

Berners prefer to stay close to the family and do not tend to wander. However, any breed if left alone for extended periods will get bored and go looking for something to do. If the puppy cannot be watched he should be safely secured in a fenced yard or dog run. Better yet, in the house with the family.

What is their temperament like?

With the training essential for ownership of a large working breed, adult Berners are generally gentle, easygoing and tolerant. They do not do well when isolated from people or activity. This breed can be slow to mature, and young dogs can be very active compared to the trained, often mellow adult. While Berners should not be shy, this tendency does run in the breed. Due to temperament concerns it is very important to expose Bernese to a wide variety of people, places and other animals, especially in their first year of life. But be careful not to over expose your puppy to situation that they find stressful. Learn to read your puppy and take things slowly and make sure new experiences are positive.

Are Bernese easy to train?

Bernese generally like to please their people, but you must earn their respect. Some dogs can be challenging and take more work. Bernese are also smart enough to manipulate their owners. Generally, most Bernese are sensitive, impressionable dogs. Some may be "soft". Bad or scary experiences are hard to overcome and are best anticipated and avoided. Only positive training techniques should be used. These dogs have lots of heart and their owners need to understand their dogs' unique, psychological make-up. Your breeder should be able to assist you with training advice and methods.

How much should I expect to pay for a Bernese Puppy?

Prices of puppies will depend on a variety of factors. Locality, availability, quality. The prices now average between \$2,300 - \$2,800. Higher cost does not necessarily equate to higher quality. Be sure to that you fully understand the terms to which you are agreeing when purchasing a puppy, particularly if you are asked to provide a large deposit up front --you may find it is non-refundable.

How much exercise does a Bernese require?

Berners require a moderate amount of exercise to maintain good health and condition. Some individuals are natural athletes while others have couch potato tendencies. To keep them fit they should go for at least two brisk walks daily.

Where do I go to see a Bernese?

Dog shows are a good place to start when you are determining what type of dog your family prefers. Once you have narrowed down the selection to a couple of breeds, contact breeders and owners in your area. You can get a listing of breeders from the CKC website or through the breed clubs. See as many dogs as you possibly can. Even if the breeders are not planning a litter... go and see their dogs anyway. The more information and experience that you can gather on the breed, the better informed you will be when you do get a chance at purchasing a family companion.



How long should I expect to wait for a puppy?

Up to a years wait is not unusual. It will depend mostly on the type of home you can provide and what interests you have in the breed. Expect to wait longer for show/breeding potential pups since they are fewer in numbers than pet quality. Likewise if you wish to purchase from a particular breeder. Most breeders will want to meet you if possible and then put you on a waiting list if you are both in agreement of you getting a puppy from that particular breeder. It is considered quite common to ship a puppy from one part of the country to another part or even to another country... do not be afraid to contact breeders outside of your area. However there are a few drawbacks... you will not likely be able to see both parents of the litter or meet the breeder in person. You can request a list of references of previous puppy buyers and a video tape or pictures of the parents of the litter and possibly littermates as well. You should expect to pay for any shipping fees and the cost of a shipping crate. Although buying a puppy sight unseen can be a bit more risky, it is done successfully time after time. As long as you are dealing with a reputable breeder, you will likely be very happy. It is common courtesy to advise all the people with whom you have left your name that you have found your companion.

BERNESE BUYER BEWARE

With the popular demand for Bernese Mountain Dogs increasing, a number of puppy mills, pet stores and poor quality breeders are now selling Bernese puppies. Many of these puppies are of ill-health and poor temperaments. After sales support is very limited or non-existent. Flashy websites can be misleading. Please do some research before you buy.

**Warning Signs of a Questionable Breeder. Be wary of a breeder who:**

1. Asks for a large non-refundable deposit to reserve a puppy for you.
2. Does not thoroughly interview you before agreeing to sell you a puppy.
3. Does not provide pedigree information or know the family health history of the parents.
4. Can not provide proof of health screening on both parents. States that there are no genetic problems in the lines of their dogs.
5. Does not allow you to see the mother of the puppies.
6. Sells unregistered puppies or charges additional money for registered puppies.
7. Routinely advertises puppies for sale on several websites (eg. Kijiji).

Finding a Bernese Mountain Dog Puppy from a conscientious, reputable breeder may not be easy. Be prepared to wait some time to get a puppy. Most good breeders have a waiting list for their puppies, but remember "good things come to those who wait".



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Links of interest

Berner Garde Foundation www.bernergarde.org

Canadian Kennel Club www.ckc.ca

Orthopedic Foundation for Animals www.ofa.org