



Estrela Mountain Dog

Serra da Estrela Mountain Dog

Cão da Serra da Estrela

ABOUT

The Estrela Mountain dog originates from Portugal and is named for its area of development and settlement, the Estrela Mountains area. However, its true origin has been lost in time. Nevertheless it is considered one of the most ancient breeds in the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal, Spain and its surrounding Islands).

The Estrela Mountain dog comes in two coat types, long and short, but both should have a coat resembling the texture of goat hair. They appear in different colors, but they all have a dark facial mask.

HIS JOB

Livestock guardian – He is calm but fearless, and an exceptional watchdog as well as an excellent guard dog. They are intelligent, bravely, loyal and faithful but naturally distrustful towards strangers.

The Estrela Mountain Dog was bred to protect sheep and cattle, especially in mountain regions and to follow the shepherd with its flock to defend them against wolves and thieves.

The Mountain Dogs were used to stay and guard the flock, even when the shepherd went to the village. They have a typical independent character and the capacity to act self-willed and by themselves in case of danger. He has a tendency to bark, especially when protecting his or her territory.

HIS NUMBERS

Height (withers): Male 63-75 cm; bitches 60-71 cm

Weight: Male 45-60 kg; bitches 35-45 kg

Life expectancy: average 10 to 12 years

HEALTH

The Estrela Mountain dog is a general healthy breed and is known to be quite hardy. Due to the isolation of the Estrela Mountain region it is difficult to access and the passed times the breed was kept quite pure. Most issues are those you will often see with other large, heavy dogs. So it might be smart to consult your vet about these. Such conditions are hip- and elbowdisplasia, gastric torsion (raised platform for eating recommended); arthritis, but also conditions like entropion & cataract are seen.



HISTORY

The Estrela Mountain dog belongs to one of the oldest breeds of the Iberian Peninsula, but there is actually not much concrete information about the origin of the breed. It has existed in these Portuguese Mountain region for quite a while where they were used for protecting sheep and cattle and to follow the shepherd with its flock to defend them against wolves and thieves. The Estrela developed over a period of hundreds of years. The shepherd chose to breed the dogs that had the characteristics necessary to survive in these mountain environment and to do their job: large-sized, strong, having endurance, agile, able to tolerate a marginal diet, powerful mouth, a tuft of hair around its neck, a warm coat and a protective and loyal temperament, yet alert for predators or thieves.

Life did not change much for the people and dogs of the region, even into the 20th century. The isolation of the region meant the breed was relatively unknown for the outside world until the early 1900' s. There was not that much breeding either since shepherds had their dogs castrated to prevent them from leaving their flock to mate.

The first recorded breed standard was published in 1922, which mainly reflected the functional features naturally found in the best dogs at the time. The hooked tail, the turned-back ears and also dew-claws (for climbing). The first official breed standard was written in 1933 which attempted to differentiate the Estrela as a distinct breed. Before WWII, the shepherds and farmers of the region were primarily the breeders. Since they were mostly illiterate, they did not make any attempt to follow the official breed standard, if they even knew one existed. But by the early 1950' s interest in the breed returned. During this period, the long-haired variety was most popular at shows, but show dogs represented only a small portion of the Estrela population in Portugal, and still do. Many of the working dogs were, and are, short-haired. Later, in the early 1970' s, interest was steeply declining again. There was some concern about the degeneration and even possible extinction of the breed, but the Portuguese revolution of 1974 helped save the Estrela when it led to changes both in dog shows in Portugal and in Portuguese dog breeds.

There is no record of the Estrela outside Portugal prior to 1972. In 1972 and 1973, pairs were exported to the US, but it was the UK that first established the breed outside Portugal in 1972 (in the US in 1998). The Estrela Mountain dog was recorded in the AKC' s Foundation Stock Service in 2004.

To this day, the Estrela Mountain dog remains true to its guardian heritage. It is still a working dog, guarding flocks in its native Portugal and elsewhere.

