



# AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL KENNEL COUNCIL LTD

Extended Breed Standard of the  
**PYRENEAN SHEEPDOG**  
**LONGHAIRD**

(Chien de berger des Pyrénées à poil long)

Produced by

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## **HISTORY OF THE BREED**

Its origins lost in the mists, the Pyrenean Sheepdog has resided in the Pyrenees Mountains of Southern France since time immemorial. Myths abound that the breed is descended from native Pyrenean bears and foxes; and that this was the original dog of the Cro-Magnon people who painted the mountain cave at Lascaux 25,000 years ago.

What we can know is that bones of small dogs abound in Neolithic sub-fossil deposits, and that sheep and goat herding were so well developed in the Pyrenees that by 6000 BC the ecology of the region had been transformed by overgrazing.

Throughout the centuries, transhumance herding has been the mainstay of the economy of the High Pyrenees, and this ancient lifestyle persists even into the twenty-first century. Many Pyrenean Sheepdogs of excellent type (but with no registered ancestors) still herd sheep every day in the Pyrenees Mountains.

Medieval accounts of life in the Pyrenees mention the dogs as constant companions. Wherever the shepherd went, his little dog went with him.

Beginning in the Early Modern period, depictions can be found in engravings, lithographs, and paintings. Especially noteworthy are Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* ("chien de berger de petite race"), Dartiguenave's *Costumes des Pyrénées*, and Descamps' "Le retour du berger".

It is well-known among residents of the High Pyrenees that when the Virgin Mary appeared to the young shepherdess Bernadette Soubirous in the grotto at Lourdes in 1858, Bernadette had her little Pyrenean Sheepdog by her side.

Representations of the breed dating to the eighteenth century display the same ear crop that is still used today, and tails that are either bobbed short or left long and carried in the correct low position.

An important factor in developing and maintaining breed type across the centuries was that the pastoral industry relied on two breeds. The Great Pyrenees guarded the flocks against predation by bears, wolves, lynxes and foxes, whereas the Pyrenean Sheepdog was used solely for herding and not for protection.

This allowed selection to concentrate on maintaining a high degree of herding instinct, soundness and type. As the dogs did not need to defend themselves, small size was valued. Smaller dogs are quicker and more sure-footed on the windy crags. They also need less alimentation, allowing the shepherd to keep more individual dogs, and thus a larger population of sheep - some for subsistence and some for market.

Thus, the population of Pyrenean Sheepdogs has been consistently high across the centuries, augmenting the power of selective breeding to decrease genetic defects and maintain breed type and working ability.

Members of the breed first distinguished themselves outside the Pyrenees Mountains by their service during WWI. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Pyrenean Sheepdogs gave their lives for the cause. They were used as couriers, as search and rescue dogs finding injured soldiers after battles, and to accompany guards on their rounds. J. Dhers, officer in charge of war dogs, remarked the day after final victory that it was his "duty to proclaim" that, the Pyrenean Sheepdog was "the most intelligent, the most cunning, the most able, and the fastest" among all the breeds used.

After the war, the Réunion des Amateurs de Chiens Pyrénéens (RACP) was founded to preserve both the Great Pyrenees and the Pyrenean Sheepdog, and this remains the French parent club today. The Pyrenean Sheepdog breed was granted full recognition in France in 1926. This led to increased participation in both shows and herding trials. The effort was led by Bernard Senac-Lagrange, vice-president of the French Kennel Club (SCC) and a native of the High Pyrenees. RACP has had only 4 presidents, Senac-Lagrange, Charles Duconte, Guy Mansencal, and Alain Pécoult. Leadership of the club has been conservative in a so far highly sucessful effort to preserve type.

## **BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

Coming from humble beginnings, it was practically unknown to the official dog scene until the early 20th century. Its type varies considerably from one valley to the next, its shape, its coat can be very different, but its character and behaviour never vary. The first official standard was drawn up between 1921 and 1925 by Mr. Bernard Sénac-Lagrange. It was first modified under his presidency and then under those of Messrs. Charles Duconte (1954-1986), Guy Mansencal (1986-2000) and Alain Pécoult (since 2000) in close collaboration with Raymond Triquet since 2001.

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament, and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function with soundness essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be mindful of features which could be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed.



## **! GENERAL APPEARANCE**

*Dog displaying a maximum of nervous energy in a minimum of size and weight. An ever alert physiognomy, a knowing air combined with great liveliness of movement give this dog a characteristic appearance unlike any other.*

### ***Important proportions:***

***Skull is about as long as wide.***

***Muzzle is shorter than skull in ratio: muzzle 2, skull 3.***

***Length of body is greater than height at withers.***

***Distance from elbow to ground is greater than half height at withers.***

The general appearance, the Pyrenean Sheepdog is of a small, lean, lively dog whose personality is reflected in the vibrant expression of his triangular head and wind-swept face. His athleticism can be seen in his flowing gait, best described as "shaves the earth." His coat is uncoiffed, his substance is light-boned, and his shape is that of a horizontal rectangle.

A small, sinewy, lean, lively dog whose sparkling personality and quicksilver intelligence are reflected in the vibrant expression of his unique triangular head and windswept face. A superb athlete, his beautiful, flowing gait "shaves the earth." Uncoiffed, light-boned and built as a horizontal rectangle, his high energy and intelligent, cunning, mischievous attitude show that he is always on alert, suspicious, ready for action. An ardent herder of all kinds of livestock, his vigilant attitude and great vivacity of movement give this little dog a highly singular gait and appearance, characteristic of no other breed.

The Pyrenean Sheepdog is naturally distrustful of strangers, but when well-socialised from a young age, he or she has a very lively, cheerful disposition.

Heavy non active dogs, ogival (curved) skulls, rounded foreheads, stop too pronounced or non existent are all regarded as severe faults.

The important proportions should be carefully noted

1. Skull is about as long as wide.
2. Muzzle is shorter than skull in ratio: muzzle 2, skull 3.
3. Length of body is greater than height at withers.
2. Distance from elbow to ground is greater than half height at withers.



Figure 1 Typical of the Breed

## **! TEMPERAMENT**

***It is a courageous, resourceful little dog, showing initiative and totally devoted to its master. It is headstrong by nature and firm control is usually needed to channel its energy and bring out the best of its intelligent liveliness. It is often wary of strangers.***

The Pyrenean Sheepdog is a very versatile herder who works from instinct to satisfy all of the shepherd's needs. He has a tendency to become passionately attached to his owner, to the complete exclusion of all others.

His high energy and mischievous attitude show that he is always on alert and ready to help his "shepherd." However, he can also be somewhat distrustful of strangers.

Dogs displaying aggressive or overly shy temperament are regarded as eliminating fault.

## **! HEAD AND SKULL**

***Triangular in shape. Skull: Moderately developed, almost flat, with a scarcely noticeable central furrow, harmoniously rounded on the sides, showing a very slight occipital protuberance. Approximately as long as it is wide. Front section slopes gently to the muzzle.***

***Stop: Scarcely discernible. Nose: Black. Muzzle: Straight, a little shorter than the skull, tapering like a wedge but without a pointed tip. Lips: Not very thick, covering the lower jaw completely and showing no apparent corners. Edges and palate are black or heavily marked with black.***

The head of the Pyrenean Sheepdog is generally triangular in shape and is rather small in proportion to the size of the dog. It is well filled under the eyes and the top skull is nearly flat.

The skull is almost flat on top, gently rounded on the sides, and has only a slight development of the occiput. The planes of the skull and muzzle are nearly parallel and there is no marked stop. The sides of the skull blend into the muzzle giving the head a triangular wedge shape.

The length of the muzzle is slightly shorter than the skull. The hair on the end of the muzzle and chin is naturally short and it lengthens as the muzzle widens towards the skull. This longer hair is what gives the Pyrenean Sheepdogs their characteristic windswept appearance.

Square or rectangular muzzles, lack of pigmentation on nose, lips or eye rims are all severe faults. As are light eyes or eyes of light expression.



*Figure 2 Excellent male head*



Figure 3 Excellent female head

A nose that is any colour other than black is a disqualification. Lips are black and tight fitting.

## ! MOUTH

**Complete dentition. Strong canines. Scissor bite (upper incisors covering lower incisors without loss of contact). Pincer bite (edge to edge) is tolerated.**

Full dentition is preferred. Incisors should meet in a scissors bite, though a level bite is acceptable. If the bite is over-shot or under-shot, the dog must be disqualified.

## ! EYES

**Expressive, slightly almond-shaped and dark brown. Neither protruding nor sunken. Wall eyes are accepted in dogs having blue with black mottling (harlequin or slate grey) coats of which they are almost always a characteristic. Eye rims are black whatever the coat colour.**

Eyes are almond-shaped and dark brown in colour. The eyes must be readily visible and not obscured by hair. Partially or completely blue eyes are only acceptable in merles. Eye rims are always black. If the Pyrenean Sheepdog is missing pigment on the eye rims or has blue eyes in any coat colour other than merle, the dog must be disqualified.

The expression is intelligent, alert, and cunning, even a little mischievous.



Figure 4 Expression - Alert, intelligent, mischievous

## ! EARS

*They must be rather short, moderately broad at the base and not set too close to each other at the top of the skull, but not set too far apart either. They are triangular, fine and ending in a point; dropped, flat and very mobile. When alert, seen from the front, the top edge notably prolongs the transversal line of the skull. They may also be half-pricked; in which case the lower part must be pricked and mobile, and ideally the top third or half of the ear should fall forward to the front or the side, symmetrically for both ears.*

They are rather short and are set on top of the head, semi-pricked with one-third to one-half falling straight forward, or to the side in the case of a rose ear. A naturally erect ear is a serious fault.



Figure 5

## ! NECK

*Rather long and muscled, springing well up from shoulders.*

The Pyrenean Sheepdog should have a rather long, well-arched neck that flows smoothly into the shoulders.

## ! FOREQUARTERS

*Upright, lean, sinewy, well-fringed. Shoulder: Rather long, moderately oblique.*

*Upper arm: Oblique and moderately long.*

*Forearm: Straight. Carpus (carpal joint): Noticeable wrist joint.*

*Metacarpus (pasterns): Slightly oblique seen from the side.*

The shoulders are moderately angulated with rather long shoulder blades. The upper arm is somewhat shorter than the shoulder blade and leads down into the light-boned, finely made forelegs.



Figure 6 Fawn male with cords

## ! BODY

*The bone structure is strong without heaviness, muscle is lean.*

*Topline: Well-supported. Withers: Prominent. Back: Rather long and strong. Loins: Short, slightly arched, but seems more so because coat is often thicker on hindquarters and croup. Croup: Fairly short and rather oblique. Chest: Moderately developed, reaching to elbow. The ribs are slightly rounded Flank: Scarcely descending.*

The body should have a rather long, well-arched neck that smoothly flows into the shoulders. The tops of the rather long shoulder blades clearly project above the line of the back. The back is strong and level. There is a slight arch over the loin that is slightly higher than the tops of the shoulder blades. The coat accentuates the appearance of the arched loin.



The croup in both varieties is rather short and oblique. On the underside of the dog, the chest descends only to the elbow and the flank is well tucked up.

Figure 7 Excellent height to length ratio



Figure 8 Brindle male with cords

## ! HINDQUARTERS

***Rather closed angulation. Semi-long coated dogs have no fringing on limbs. Upper thigh: Not very long, moderately oblique, strong, well-defined muscle. Stifle (knee): Well-angulated and parallel to the body. Lower thigh: Rather long and oblique. Hock: Lean, set low, well angulated, hocks are sometimes a little close. Metatarsus (Rear pastern): Perpendicular to the ground or very slightly oblique from back to front. Dewclaws: Single or double dewclaws are acceptable on hind legs as is their absence.***

In the hindquarters, the stifle is well bent connecting a rather short upper thigh to a long lower thigh. Hocks are short, well angulated, and often close together. The hind feet characteristically toe out slightly and this is not to be faulted. The dog can have double, single, or no dewclaws on their rear legs. All are acceptable.



Figure 9 Black dog



Figure 10 Poor tail carriage

Figure 11 Correct tail

## ! TAIL

***Well fringed, not very long, set rather low and with a hooked tip. When the dog is alert, the tail should, in general, hardly rise above the top line, however it may curve forward. In countries where this practice is not forbidden by law, some dogs are docked. A rudimentary tail is permitted.***

A natural bob, or naturally long; are equally acceptable. The naturally long tail must not rise above the level of the back. It is set on rather low, has a crook at the end, and is well furred.

## ! FEET

***Forefeet: Lean, fairly flat, of a definite oval shape. Dark pads. Small hard nails covered by hair which is also found under the foot, between the pads. Hind feet: Lean, fairly flat, of a definite oval shape. Dark pads. Small hard nails covered by hair which is also found under the foot, between the pads***

Like all working breeds the feet are an essential part of the Pyrenean's preparation for his job. Lean fairly flat, oval in shape. Both pads and nails are dark. Nails hard. Hair is found under the foot between the pads and covering the nails.



Figure 12  
Blue Merle dog with  
cords.

## ! GAIT / MOVEMENT

***Walking, the Pyrenean Sheepdog has a rather short stride. The trot, preferred pace of the Pyrenean Sheepdog should be free and vigorous. At a gentle trot, the head is carried fairly high, when the speed increases, the head is in line with the back. The feet are never raised high, the movement is flowing, and the dog skims over the ground***

The Pyrenean Sheepdog's athleticism can be seen in his flowing gait, best described by the French as "shaves the earth." It is a very flowing, harmonious gait with excellent reach and drive, but no wasted motion—the feet barely leave the ground. When the Pyrenean Sheepdog moves at a trot, he carries his head rather high. As his speed increases, he will lower his head to the level of his backline and the legs will converge toward the centre line.



Figure 13  
The dog in action

## ! COAT

***Skin: Thin, often marbled with dark patches, irrespective of coat-colour.***

***Hair: Long, or semi-long, but always dense, almost flat or slightly wavy, thicker and woollier on the croup and thighs, texture somewhere between goat's hair and sheep's wool. In some dogs the mixture of coarse and woolly hair can produce sorts of strands or cords called "cadenettes" and sometimes matted or felted hair called "matelotes" which overlap like tiles on the croup. "Cadenettes" can be found on the chest and the forelegs at elbow level. The muzzle has shorter, less dense hair.***

***On the end of the muzzle, and sometimes along the whole muzzle, it is laid flat and set from front to back. On the sides as well as on the cheeks, the hair is longer and brushed up in a windswept way from front to back. Eyes must be clearly visible and not covered by hair.***

All prizes should be withheld from any dog, whose coat has been scissored, especially on its face. The only trimming to be allowed is for minor neatening of the feet. The dog should appear distinctly rustic.

The quality of the Pyrenean Sheepdog's coat is more important than its abundance. The dog's coat is made up of long hair. It will lay almost flat or be slightly wavy.

The hair on the end of the muzzle and the chin is naturally short and it lengthens as the muzzle widens toward the skull. The longer hair on the sides of the muzzle and

cheeks is swept back giving a windblown look. Demi-long dogs have fringes on the elbows and culottes on the rump. They do not carry as much coat as the long-haired dogs do.

Longhaired dogs are often more heavily furnished with woollier hair. The texture is harsh with minimal undercoat. The facial hair should be short on the end of the muzzle, with progressively longer hair on the cheeks and sides of the muzzle giving a windblown look. The hair must not veil the eyes. Longhaired dogs may cord, especially on the elbows, croup, and thighs, but never on the head.



*Figure 14 Dogs of correct type*

## **! COLOUR**

***Fawn, lighter or darker, overlaid with black or not and sometimes with a little white on the chest and on the limbs; grey, lighter or darker, often with some white on the head, chest and limbs; blue with black mottling (harlequin or slate blue).***

***There are also brindle, black coats or black with white markings (limited spotting). Solid colours are preferred.***

Pyrenean Sheepdogs come in a variety of colours, including various shades of Fawn, Brindle, Grey, Merle, including Blue Merle, Brindle Merle and Fawn Merle. It is not considered a fault for blue merles to be somewhat dingy, ruddy or rusty in this breed.

Merles may have blue or part blue eyes. Most Fawn Merles look like light-coloured Fawns with no black mask. Also black, and black with white markings that do not exceed 30% of the body. A little white is acceptable on the chest, head, and feet of all Pyrenean Sheepdogs.

Any dog that exhibits white on 50% or more of its body must be disqualified.

Colours also include black, and black with white markings that do not exceed 30% of the body. A little white is acceptable on the chest, head, and feet of all Pyrenean Sheepdogs.

## **! SIZE**

*Height at withers : Males from 42 cm to 48 cm.*

*Females from 40 cm to 46 cm.*

*A tolerance of + or - 2 cm is allowed for perfectly typed specimens.*

## **! FAULTS**

*Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog.*

## **! SEVERE FAULTS**

*General appearance:*

*Heavy dog, not very active.*

*Ogival skull, rounded forehead, stop too much pronounced or non existent.*

*Muzzle:*

*Square or rectangular, lack of pigmentation on nose or lips.*

*Eyes:*

*Light or of wild expression. Lack of pigmentation on the eye rims.*

*Tail:*

*Tail curled on or over the loin; "squirrel tail" (carried horizontally over the back); fused vertebrae.*

*Coat:*

*Too abundant on the head, especially when it covers the eyes and on the muzzle when it looks like a griffon's moustache. Poor texture, soft, wiry, curly or frizzy. Coat lacking density or thickness.*

*Colour:*

*White covering more than one third of the coat. Harlequin coat lacking contrast between grey and black or having fawn glints. Very diluted coat colour. Black coat with tan on head and on limbs (black marked with fawn).*

## **! ELIMINATING FAULTS**

*Behaviour / Temperament:*

*Aggressive or overly shy.*

*Nose and eyelids:*

*Any colour other than perfectly black.*

*Jaws:*

*Over or under-shot, or any malformation of the jaws. Absence of more than 2 teeth (except PM 1). The presence of canines and carnassials teeth (PM4 upper jaw & M1 lower jaw) is obligatory.*

*Ears:*

*Naturally erect ears.*

**Eyes:**

*Wall-eyes for any dogs other than blue with black mottling (harlequin or slate-grey). Flesh colour on the eye-rims. Light yellow eyes.*

**Tail:**

*Limp, hanging vertically.*

**Coat:**

*Curly.*

**Colour:**

*White or colour not stipulated in standard; white covering more than 1/3 of coat in black dogs.*

**Size:**

*Outside the limits.*

***Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioral abnormalities shall be disqualified.***

***NOTE: Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.***

## **JUDGING THE PYRENEAN SHEEPDOG**

The general appearance of the Pyrenean Sheepdog is that of small, lean, lively dog whose personality is reflected in the vibrant expression of his triangular head and wind-swept face. His athleticism can be seen in his flowing gate, best described as "shaves the earth." His coat is uncoiffed, his substance is light-boned, and his shape is that of a horizontal rectangle. In temperament, his high energy and mischievous attitude show that he is always on alert and ready to help his "shepherd." However, he can also be somewhat distrustful of strangers.

The breed is always examined on the table.

The head of the Pyrenean Sheepdog is generally triangular in shape and is rather small in proportion to the size of the dog. It is well filled under the eyes and the top skull is nearly flat. Eyes are almond-shaped and dark brown in colour. The eyes must be readily visible and not obscured by hair. Partially or completely blue eyes are only acceptable in merles. Eye rims are always black. If the Pyrenean Sheepdog is missing pigment on the eye rims or has blue eyes in any coat colour other than merle, the dog must be disqualified.

The expression is intelligent, alert, and cunning, even a little mischievous. Ears are rather short and are set on top of the head. They are semi-prick with one-third to one-half falling straight forward, or to the side in the case of a rose ear. A natural erect ear is a serious fault. The skull is almost flat on top, gently rounded on the sides, and has only a slight development of the occiput. The planes of the skull and muzzle are nearly parallel and there is no marked stop. The sides of the skull blend into the muzzle giving the head a triangular wedge shape.

The length of the muzzle is slightly shorter than the skull. The hair on the end of the muzzle and chin is naturally short and it lengthens as the muzzle widens towards the skull. This longer hair is what gives the Pyrenean Sheepdog their characteristic windswept appearance.

The nose that is any colour other than black is a disqualification.

Lips are black and tight fitting. Full dentition is preferred. Incisors should meet in a scissors bite, though a level bite is acceptable. If the bite is over-shot or under-shot, the dog must be disqualified.

The Pyrenean Sheepdog should have a rather long, well-arched neck that flows smoothly into the shoulders. The tops of the rather long shoulder blades clearly project above the line of the back. The shoulders are moderately angulated. The upper arm is somewhat shorter than the shoulder blade and leads down into the light-boned, finely made forelegs.

The hair on the front of the legs is long. Pasterns are strong and sloping. The feet are oval,

The Pyrenean Sheepdog is clearly long in proportion to height – measured from point of shoulder to ischium. When you put your hands on the body, the ribs should be easily felt. The dog in good working condition is lightly boned and sinewy. The back is strong and level. There is a slight arch over the loin that is slightly higher than the tops of the shoulder blades. The coat accentuates the appearance of the arched loin. The croup is rather short and oblique. On the underside of the dog, the chest descends only to the elbow and the flank is well tucked up.

Considering the hindquarters, the stifle is well bent connecting a rather short upper thigh to a long lower thigh. Hocks are short, well angulated, and close together. The hind feet characteristically toe out slightly and this is not to be faulted. They can have double, single, or no dewclaws on their rear legs. All are acceptable.

The tail may be a natural bob or naturally long; both are equally acceptable. The naturally long tail must not rise above the level of the back. It is set on rather low, has a crook at the end, and is well furred.

The quality of the Pyrenean Sheepdog's coat is more important than its abundance. The dog's coat can be made up of long hair. It will lay almost flat or be slightly wavy.

The dog is often heavily furnished with woolly hair. The texture is harsh with minimal undercoat. The facial hair should be short on the end of the muzzle, with progressively longer hair on the cheeks and sides of the muzzle giving a windblown look. The hair must not veil the eyes. The coat may cord, especially on the elbows, croup, and thighs, but never on the head.

The dog should not be "scissored". The only trimming to be allowed is for minor neatening of the feet. The dog should appear distinctly rustic.

Pyrenean Sheepdogs come in a variety of colours, including various shades of fawn, brindle, grey, merles, including blue merle, brindle merle and fawn merle. It is not considered a fault for blue merles to be somewhat dingy, ruddy or rusty in this breed. Blue merles, brindle merles and fawn merles may have blue or part blue eyes. Most fawn merles look like light coloured fawns with no black mask. Colours also include black, and black with white markings that do not exceed 30% of the body. A little white is acceptable on the chest, head, and feet. Any dog that exhibits white on 50% or more of its body must be disqualified.

When the Pyrenean Sheepdog begins to move at a trot, the dog carries its head rather high. As speed increases, the head will be lowered to the level of the backline and the legs will converge toward the centerline. It is a very flowing, harmonious gait with excellent reach and drive, but no wasted motion— the feet barely leave the ground. The French say that the dog “shaves the earth.”

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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HISTORY of the Breed by Patricia Princehouse