



## Official Standard of the Bergamasco Sheepdog

**General Appearance:** The Bergamasco, with origins dating back almost 2,000 years, is a true heritage breed, which developed unique characteristics without man-made aesthetics.

The Bergamasco Sheepdog is a medium-sized dog of rustic appearance with an abundant coat covering all parts of the body. Strong, sound and brave, the Bergamasco is above all very intelligent, calm and even-tempered. The distinctive flocks (flat woolly strands of felted hair) that cover their bodies protect them from the elements, as well as making them appear larger, with a foreboding appearance warning most predators to stay away. Bergamascos are mountain sheepdogs that are slightly longer than tall. Their unique skeletal structure makes them well-equipped for working in rough terrain. Correct, efficient movement is essential. Owing to the steeper shoulder and pelvis angles, they have a free, low-reaching, extended elastic trot with both front and rear feet remaining close to the ground. Having no need for speed, their gait is a steady, slow trot that can be maintained for long periods without tiring.

There is a fair amount of variation both with respect to size and coat. The variations discussed in detail below are not considered undesirable as they do not affect the working ability of the dog. The ideal Bergamasco at any stage in coat development is a well-balanced dog with a rustic appearance. The ideal height ranges from 21 to 25 inches.

**Size, Proportion, Substance:** The Bergamasco is ideally suited to move and guard sheep on the alpine rocky slopes and pastures with a body slightly longer than tall. Built for strength and resistance, the Bergamasco has a lean, athletic build on sturdy (but not heavy) bones with a well-developed chest, relatively short necks with firm, limber muscles. This framework is well-muscled, without being thick or bulky. The length of body measured from point of shoulder to point of buttocks is 5 to 6 percent longer than the height measured at the withers. (Height-to-length ratio approximately 10:10.5 to 11.) Measured at the withers, the ideal dog stands 23½ inches and the ideal bitch stands 22 inches. However, there is a fair amount of variation in the breed with respect to height, and taller females or shorter males are acceptable as long as they are between 21 and 25 inches tall. Males weigh between 70 and 84 pounds. Females weigh between 57 and 71 pounds. Disqualification – Height under 21 inches. Any height over 25 inches must be considered a fault. The minimum height requirement of 21 inches shall not apply to dogs or bitches under twelve months of age.

**Head:** The *head* is large, roughly proportionate to the size of the dog. The skull and muzzle are of equal length, (parallel to one another) and joined at a pronounced stop. The hair on the head may either be flocked or not. In either case, the typical disheveled appearance is natural and rustic. *Eyes* - The eyes are large, oval, and set just slightly obliquely. Eye color is chestnut, with the darkness of the color varying from hazel to dark brown. The eye rims are tight-fitting and black pigmented; eyelashes are particularly long so that they can lift the hair falling from the forehead over the eyes. The expression is attentive and calm. Disqualifications – Any lack of pigmentation of the eye rims; one (or two) full blue eye(s). *Ears* - The ears are soft and thin and hang down on either side of the face. The ears are set high. At its widest point, the ear is from 2½ to 3 inches wide. Ear length does not exceed half the length of the head, and shorter is preferred. The top two-thirds of the ear is triangular, with slightly rounded tips. When the dog is alert, the ears prick up at the base, with the top two-thirds semi-drooping. Viewed from the side, the ears appear to be an extension of the curve of the back of the neck. The ears may either be



flocked or not. *Skull* - The skull is slightly domed between the ears and rounded at the forehead. The skull is as wide as it is long and features a prominent occiput and a marked median furrow. *Muzzle* - The depth and width of the muzzle, measured at midpoint, are each half the length of the muzzle. The muzzle is blunt, tapering only slightly toward the nose. The upper longitudinal planes of the skull and the muzzle are parallel. *Nose* - The nose is large and black, with big, well-opened nostrils. In profile, the nose is on the same line as the top of the muzzle and does not extend beyond the forepart of the muzzle. *Disqualification* – Dudley nose. *Lips* - The lips are tight and black pigmented. *Bite and Teeth*: The jaw is wide with strong, evenly spaced teeth meeting in a scissors bite. The line of the incisors is straight and perpendicular to the outside lines of the jaw. A level bite is acceptable. *Serious Faults* – Overshot, with a space greater than one eighth of an inch. Undershot bite, such that there is a complete loss of contact by all the incisors.

**Neck, Topline, Body:** *Neck* - The neck is strong, slightly arched, with well-developed muscles. Measured from the nape to the forward edge of the withers, the neck is 20 percent shorter than the length of the head. The neck circumference is at least twice the length of the neck. There is no dewlap. The hair on the neck forms a thick collar with a varying degree of flocks present. In action, the neck is carried forward with its upper profile almost a continuation of the topline, with only a slight angle at the withers. *Topline* - The stacked side silhouette presents a level topline to a slight rise over the loin with a slightly sloping croup falling off to a low-set tail. While moving, the topline is level. *Body* - *Chest and Ribs*: The chest is heart-shaped when felt from the front. The rib cage is well-sprung and let down to the elbow. (The depth of the rib cage is equal to half the dog's height at the withers.) *Tuck-up* - Tuck-up is nearly absent. *Back* - The back is straight. *Loin* - The loin is slightly convex, firmly joining the back and the croup. *Croup* - In the Bergamasco, the croup slopes about 35 degrees downward from the horizontal. *Pelvis* - The pelvis is well-developed. The length is 31 to 32 percent of the height at the withers with a fallaway of 35 to 40 degrees from horizontal. Due to the steeper inclination of the pelvis, the rear extension is lesser than other breeds who work on flat terrain where speed and stride width are more important than power. Therefore, at a trot, the Bergamasco's drive will not be as high and long as other herding dogs. *Tail* - The tail is natural and undocked, thick at the base, and tapering to the tip, inserted in the lower third of the croup. When in repose, the tail hangs down to the hock and curves slightly outward. While moving the tail flags back-and-forth at a level higher than the topline, but not curling forward over the back.

**Forequarters:** The legs are straight when viewed from the front and side and well-proportioned in relation to the size of the dog. *Shoulders* - The shoulders are tightly knit and strong. The shoulder blades are wide and long with a steep angulation, 55 to 60 degrees from the horizontal. The length is at least one-fourth the height at the withers. *Upper Arms* - The upper arms are strong and well-muscled. They are just slightly longer than the shoulder blades. The angle formed by the upper arm and shoulder blade is about 115 degrees. The ratio between the distance from withers to elbow and from elbow to the ground is 1:1. This is essential for a dog which has to move both up and downhill where extra effort is required. *Elbows* - Elbows are set on a plane parallel to the body. They are neither close to the body nor jutting out. The humero-radial angle (between upper-arm and forearm) ranges from 150 to 155 degrees. The hair hanging down from the elbows is profuse, long and thick, tending to flock. *Forearms* - The forearms are strong with lean muscle. They are roughly the same length as the upper arms (1:1) and are



placed so that the point of the elbow is on a vertical line falling from the top of the shoulder blade. Pasterns - The pastern joint (carpus) follows the vertical line of the forearm and is very mobile. The pasterns are straight when viewed from the front, and slightly sloping when viewed from the side (about 10 degrees from vertical). Dewclaws - Dewclaws may be removed. Feet - The front feet are oval shaped, arched with tight toes, well-flocked with hair. Pads - The pads of the feet are thick and black pigmented with a tight skin. Nails - The toenails are strong and black.

**Hindquarters:** The Legs are straight when viewed from the back and well-proportioned in relation to the size of the dog. The femur and tibia are roughly the same length. This, in combination with the 35 to 40 degree slope of the pelvis, make the dog better suited for locomotion over hilly territories. Upper Thighs - The upper thighs are long, wide, and well-muscled, sloping downward and forward at a 95 to 100 degree angle from the pelvis. Stifles (Knees) - The Stifles are perfectly in line with the limbs, neither turned in nor out. Lower Thighs - The lower thighs are as long as the upper thighs, with lean muscles. They slope downward and back, forming an angle of about 105 to 110 degrees at the stifle joint (femur-tibia). Hocks - The length of the hock is no less than 25 percent of the height at the withers. Viewed from behind, the rear pasterns are vertical and parallel to one another. Viewed from the side, the rear pasterns are vertical and placed so that the hocks just slightly extend past a vertical line dropped from the point of buttock. The angle of the hock joint (tibio-tarsal) is about 130 to 135 degrees. Dewclaws - Dewclaws may be removed. Feet - The back feet are slightly smaller than the front ones. They are oval shaped, arched with tight toes, well-flocked with hair. Pads - The pads of the feet are thick and black pigmented with a tight skin. Nails - The toenails are strong and black.

**Coat:** The Bergamasco is a rustic, working dog with a coat that takes years to reach maturity, and can vary considerably. As discussed in detail below, the distribution, size, texture and thickness of the flocks grow differently in each individual. A young dog's coat goes through a number of stages in the early years. Female coats are subject to change due to hormones and raising pups. These are natural differences and therefore are not to be penalized.

The make-up of the Bergamasco's coat is extremely complex. The hair is composed of three types of hair: undercoat, "goat hair," and woolly hair. The undercoat is short, dense, and of fine texture adhering to the skin forming a protective, waterproof layer. The "goat hair" is strong and rough in texture, as in goats, which stays smooth without tufting together with itself. The third type of hair is woolly hair. This type is somewhat finer in texture and grows together in tufts. The "goat hair" and the woolly hair naturally weave together over time and form the flocks, which have a tight consistency akin to boiled wool. The flocks are somewhat flat, irregular in shape, and sometimes open in a fan-shape at the tip. The distribution of the goat and woolly hair over the body is not homogeneous. Because of this, there is little uniformity in the abundance, size and width of the flocks throughout the body. For instance, from the top of head, continuing over the top of neck and top of withers and often down to the shoulder joint up to the middle of the back, "goat hair" predominates, resulting in a smoother texture and less flock formation. However, the complete absence of wool is not acceptable. On the remaining parts of the neck, shoulders and chest, the presence of the woolly hair is more prevalent; thus, has more flock formation. On the back of the body and the legs, the woolly hair is very abundant and mingles with the reduced quantity of "goat hair;" thus, an abundance of flocks form in this region. The



hair on the legs also hangs in flocks rather than feathering. The hair on the top of head and ears may either be flocked or not. In either case, the typical disheveled appearance is natural and rustic and hangs over the eyes. The eyelashes are exceptionally long and serve to hold the hair/flocks somewhat away from the eyes. The coat is never shaven or the wool brushed out. Trimming is acceptable for hygienic reasons and the ease of movement around the feet and pads. Also, the coat may be thinned or trimmed when it becomes too thick and long hampering normal movement and compromises the dog's welfare. However it must maintain the traditional rustic appearance of the dog.

**Puppies:** From birth to 10 to 12 months of age, the coat is soft and short. At approximately 9 to 10 months of age, the goat hair and woolly undercoat begin to grow in. Human intervention is usually required to separate the coat into the beginnings of flocks at this point. This leads to the formation of informal bundles, then eventually to stubby formations that can give an unkempt and messy appearance at this period of the dog's life. This is natural and unavoidable. It is only at approximately 3 years of age that the flocks will have grown long enough for the unique look for which the dog is known to begin to be achieved. The flocks continue to grow throughout the dog's life. They may reach the ground at 5 to 6 years of age; hence young dogs must not be penalized for a coat which has not yet lengthened.

**Color:** Only eumelanin, *i.e.*, black melanin is present in Bergamascos. Bergamascos are born solid gray or gradations of gray (including merle) up to and including solid black. The color often changes to different shades as the dog matures. The majority of dogs born black as well as the black patches of the merle dogs will lighten into shades of grey from light to charcoal due to a "fading black" gene; a few will remain black. A superficial coloring includes shadings of tawny-brown and fawn at the lower part of flocks as a result of discoloration of old hair under the influence of sun, water and atmospheric factors in general as well as aging of the hair. The loose hairs gradually change color: the gray hairs turn yellowish while the black ones take on a tawny hue. The overall look of these may be more reddish brown from a distance. The flocks must be examined at the roots, close to the skin, here the coat must be either black or gray. Solid white is not allowed but white markings are acceptable if they cover no more than one-fifth of the body. Disqualification – White coat color on more than one-fifth of the total area of the body.

**Gait:** Bergamascos had to adapt to various ways of moving the sheep, sometimes covering long distances every day to get to the grazing grounds, while at other times they would only cover short distances within specific areas. The gait must have steady and elastic movement with resistance for efficiency and power. Due to its unique angulations of the fore and hind quarters and compact build, the Bergamasco's gait is focused on resistance, strength and low center of gravity, with both fore and hind feet closer to the ground. The forward and backward reach, while extended are less than flatland herding breeds. The proportions and angles of the fore and hind quarters provide the needed for strength and resilience in hilly terrain. Their natural gait is slower paced than other herding dogs.

The natural and preferred gait for the Bergamasco to achieve a calm and balance movement while preserving energy in a mountainous terrain is a free, extended, elastic, slow trot with both front and rear feet remaining close to the ground. The pasterns are supple and flex freely at a 90-degree angle. The head is carried forward with the neck forming a slight angle at the withers.



The topline is level, and the tail flags back and forth at a level higher than the topline, but not curling forward over the back.

**Temperament:** The Bergamasco is a drover and a guardian. The primary functions are to move and guard herds and livestock. Tasks for which the breed expresses consummate ability, thanks to its qualities of vigilance, concentration and harmonious build. The Bergamasco's capacity for learning and strong determination are combined with a calm and patient temperament. They are bred to think for themselves and assess each situation. This does account for some of the stubbornness that runs in them. Bergamascos have a unique ability to size people up and determine the appropriate way to interact with both family members and strangers. While they may appear aloof, they are ever watchful. Just because the eyes are not seen does not mean they are not watching. They have an eager-to-please nature and establish a close relationship with humans. The breed must never be aggressive without cause, or fearful. Bergamascos are highly intelligent and self-possessed and may display indifference to attempts to engage their attention.

**Serious Faults:** Overshot, with a space greater than one eighth of an inch. Undershot bite, such that there is a complete loss of contact by all the incisors.

#### **Disqualifications**

*Height under 21 inches. The minimum height requirement of 21 inches shall not apply to dogs or bitches under twelve months of age.*

*Any lack of pigmentation of the eye rims; one (or two) full blue eye(s).*

*Dudley nose.*

*White coat color on more than one-fifth of the total area of the body.*

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