

A brief history of the Dutch Shepherd Dog.

The “Dutch Shepherd” or “Hollandse Herder” as it is known in it’s homeland, the Netherlands , is an FCI registered breed. The official breed club (Nederlandse Herdershonden Club’) was founded in the Netherlands in 1898, and similar to the Belgian Shepherd, the Dutch Shepherd comes in different varieties. The three varieties are - short coat, long coat and rough coat. The short coat and long coats come in either gold or silver brindle while the rough coat can come in gold and silver brindle as well as salt and pepper.

In the late 1800’s there wasn’t as much to distinguish between the Belgian, German and Dutch Shepherds as there is today. They were all shepherd dogs and while they were different in a lot of respects, they were also cross-bred with each other on occasions. Some of the early German Shepherd dogs were brindle in colour and after a few years into this breeds development the brindle colour was taken out of the gene pool.

It wasn’t until the 1890’s that these three breeds went their separate ways and became breeds of their own right, and hence, the Dutch Shepherd became the brindle shepherd dog of Holland .

From 1898 to 1914 there were a lot of changes in the breed standard of the Dutch Shepherd, and while things settled down after this point there were still a few changes that would happen. After the first and second world wars the numbers and condition of the Dutch Shepherds was under threat (as were most dogs) so they again out crossed to the Belgium Shepherd dog to bring in new blood. Around the time of the First World War there were also some crosses to the German Shepherds but the results were disastrous, so any future crosses were only made to the Belgium Shepherd. And so after over 100 years of development and refinement we have today the modern Dutch Shepherd Dog.

While the Dutch Shepherd is a breed in its own right there are now generally considered to be two different “types” of Dutch Shepherd available.

The first is the FCI registered Dutch Shepherd. These dogs are bred to FCI standards with official pedigrees and generally compete in conformation shows and or are trained in various dog sports and working pursuits such as IPO, Agility and SAR. These dogs, like most pedigree dogs, are in the main, bred more for conformation showing as per FCI Standards, with only a few breeders concentrating on producing these dogs specifically for working pursuits. The registered Dutch Shepherd is not a large breed in terms of numbers with approximately 4000 dogs currently registered with the FCI.

The second type of Dutch Shepherd is that most commonly found in the Royal Dutch Police Dog or “Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging” (KNPV) training program. Here in it’s homeland the Dutch Shepherd is one of the mainstay breeds of the KNPV, along with the ever-popular Malinois. In fact a

Dutch Shepherd called “Fritz” won an international Police dog competition in Germany back in 1908.

It is worth noting that two of three founding members of the KNPV were also members in the Dutch Shepherd Club.

Within the KNPV program, the Dutch Shepherd has survived without the influence and pressures of the conformation circles and has not been restricted by the need for an official pedigree. The Dutch Shepherd of the KNPV program is, and always has been, bred to be a working police dog. Even within the KNPV program, compared to the Malinois, the Dutch Shepherd is only relatively small in population yet continues to maintain a working police dog heritage that few breeds can match. Since the year 2000 the Dutch Shepherd has been winning the national KNPV championships on a regular basis. The 2001 PH1, 2002 PH2, 2003 PH2, 2006 PH1 titles were won by Dutch Shepherds, not to mention all the 2nd and 3rd places gained by other high quality Dutch Shepherds.

Unlike the dog sport programs such as IPO, Schutzhund, and even French Ring, the KNPV has no requirement for dogs to hold an FCI or official pedigree. In fact, around about 90% of the dogs titled in the KNPV program do not have FCI or official pedigrees. The KNPV program believes that official pedigrees are not required to produce quality police dogs - and the continuing success of the program has proven this to be true. Although a little controversial, most would have to agree that generally most dogs that successfully obtained a KNPV title would be capable of obtaining IPO and Schutzhund titles, where as, the same could not be said of as many Schutzhund or IPO titled dogs being capable of achieving KNPV Police Dog Titles.

The difference with the unregistered Dutch Shepherds found in the KNPV program is that they have a strong influence of Malinois blood in them. Without the restriction of official registration or pedigree, the definition of whether a dog is a Malinois or a Dutch Shepherd, primarily comes down to appearance. When a Malinois is bred to a Dutch Shepherd some of the pups will be born with a Fawn coat and will be known as a Malinois, while others will be born with a brindle coat and will be known as a Dutch Shepherd. One legendary KNPV Dutch Shepherd was Arras Pegge. While Arras had a Dutch Shepherd for a mother his father was a Malinois. This simple classification process has allowed the unregistered Dutch Shepherd (and unregistered Malinois for that matter) to develop and maintain a large gene pool for breeding. Although the unregistered Dutch Shepherd can carry a good deal of Malinois blood, people often comment that they still maintain the often desirable traits of the Dutch Shepherd, that is, a highly driven, sometimes stubborn dog with more calmness than a Malinois. They are also often described as “a Malinois with an off switch!”

In general, the un-registered KNPV Dutch Shepherd is a larger dog (males can reach over 70 cms at the shoulder and weigh up to 55 kgs, while females can reach over 65 cms and weigh up to 40 kgs) with larger bones and head size than the FCI registered dogs. They also commonly have a far more highly and widely regarded working character than the Dutch Shepherds bred solely to FCI standards.

Of interest is the fact that in some European countries such as Belgium, the official stud books have not been closed for the Dutch Shepherd and a number of quality unregistered Dutch Shepherds from the KNPV program have entered the FCI database. One such dog is the 2002 National KNPV PH2 Champion “Nico Van Neerland”. These dogs will add to the working qualities of the registered Dutch Shepherds in the future.

The search for quality working dogs for police, military and high level competition around the world has led to a large demand for the Dutch Shepherd and as such this breed will become a far more common site in the different service departments around the world, just as it has in it’s homeland of Holland.