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## Bergamasco Sheepdog Club of America



# Overview

- General description
- A brief history
- Herding
- Interpreting the Standard
- Skeletal structure
- Movement
- The coat
- Colors and Genetics





His **imposing aspect is increased by the thick coat** which is one of his typical characteristics and makes him different from any other dog. The Bergamasco's coat is characterized by three types of hair, which is abundant and forms “**mats**” or “**flocks**” and is the distinguishing characteristic of this breed. The overall look of the Bergamasco is that of a very rustic and natural dog, **the coat should NOT appear brushed out.**

## General description:

The Bergamasco is a **medium size dog**, well proportioned and harmonious with a **rustic appearance**. It's a solidly compact dog with a strong, **powerful build** that gives him **great resistance** without taking away any of his **agility**.



# A brief history:

The Bergamasco sheepdog is a **very ancient Alpine breed**.

For many centuries it was commonly found in the Alpine valleys, thanks to its exceptional skills as **a flock guide**, when sheep raising was the main economic resource in this area. Bergamascos are thought to be a 2000 years old breed.

The origins of the breed can be found to have come from Asia, where domestication of sheep and goats by migrating populations in search of new pastures expanded from east to west, from the upper plains of Asia across the mountains of Anatolia, the Caucasus, the Carpathians and the Alps to the Pyrenees.



The ancestors of our modern Bergamasco arrived in Italy in the wake of migratory populations, spreading right over the flanks of the Alps. Through the centuries this **breed virtually remained the same**. With the advent of wide scale agriculture, the Bergamasco sheepdog evolved to become a **flock driver, friendlier, with great intelligence and with the courage to confront wild animals that might prey on the flocks**. Overtime the grazing area extended as far as Switzerland by the latter Middle Age (AD 739) from the eastern regions of Piedmont and Lombardy.

Those shepherds originally from the Bergamo region traveled from the Swiss Plains to the Po Valley and thus the Alpine Sheepdog gain the name of Bergamasco Sheepdog, originally referring to the shepherds.



# Herding

Bergamasco are to be seen as **mountain sheepdogs**, they are **built for strength and resistance with well-developed chest and ample thorax, relative short necks with strong muscles.**

Their type of **herding is of a flock drover, nomadic in difficult mountainous terrain.**

Sheep are timid in nature and tend to bolt when scared. When the flock moves, it is slowly with a tendency to disperse. In rough terrain, the **dogs job is to keep the upper hand without provoking panic, walking along side the flock, moving back and forth with no specific need for great speed.**

When the grazing area are reach, **the dogs had to keep an eye on the flock**, so the sheep did not wander too far or run into danger by getting to close to ravines and cliffs. When intervention is indispensable, the dogs need to avoid brusque movements to avoid the sheep to panic with a full stomach or to fall in steep terrain.

The gait has to be even, moderate and with great resistance.



# Interpreting the Standard



## BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard (Herding Group)

## COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

### General Appearance

The Bergamasco is a muscular, heavy-boned herding dog with a large head and a thick tail that hangs down to the hock and curves slightly upward at the end. The entire dog is covered with an abundant coat that forms mats. The Bergamasco is compact in profile but is just slightly longer than tall. The Bergamasco's characteristic feature is its unique coat, made up of three types of hair. The coat forms flocks (strands of hair weaved together creating flat layers of felted hair) or loose mats, which cover the dog's body and legs, and protect the dog from weather and predators. The hair on the head is typically long and hangs over the eyes.

### General Appearance

The Bergamasco Sheepdog is a 2000 years old natural breed with very little human manipulation. The individuals of the breed are not cut in one single mold. Flocks (the coat) size, texture and thickness grow differently in each individual. Some larger and heavier males can be relatively bigger than petite females (85lbs vs 55 lbs). In judging a Bergamasco in conformation, one must look for a well balanced, with **a rustic appearance, instead of a cookie cutter image. The flocks must be un-brushed and natural without clipping nor cutting.** Females tend to have a lighter coat and dogs under 4 years old have much shorter flocks and should not be undervalued due to the lack of coat.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

**Size, Proportion, Substance**

Dogs stand 23½ inches and bitches 22 inches, measured at the withers. One inch taller or shorter than the ideal is acceptable. Males weigh between 70 and 84 pounds. Females weigh between 55 and 71 pounds The Bergamasco is a muscular, heavy-boned herding dog with plenty of substance. The Bergamasco is very slightly longer than tall, with the length of body measured from point of shoulder to point of buttocks about 5 to 6 percent longer than the height measured at the withers.

Disqualification: Height under 22½ inches and over 24½ inches in a male; under 21 inches and over 23 inches in a female.



COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD



**Size:**

Males ideally stand 23½ inches and females 22 inches (with only +/- 2 cm). The Bergamasco is pretty homogeneous in its size. It is considered a medium size breed with a muscular compact built. A tall lanky body is atypical.

Males should be masculine and regal (70 to 84 lbs relative to the height of the dog, ie: a smaller dog would weight less than a taller dog which would be at the top of the range).

Females are more feminine in body with a distinct weight difference than males (55lbs to 71 lbs), so that the largest of the females weights the same as the smallest of the males.



BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Head**

The head is long, more or less, proportionate to the size of the dog, with the skull and muzzle of equal length, parallel to one another, and joined at a pronounced stop. The skin on the head is tight with no wrinkles.

**Eyes:** The eyes are large, oval, and set just slightly obliquely. Eye color is brown, with the darkness of the color varying with the color of the coat. The eye rims are tight-fitting and black. The expression is attentive and calm.



**Eyes:** Note that the eye color can be any shade of haze to dark brown, a lighter eye (as long as it is not blue) is not a fault.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Ears:** The ears are soft and thin and hang down on either side of the face. The ears are set on 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 in shape, 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 are covered with soft, slightly wavy hair, forming fringes at the tip.

**Skull:** The skull is slightly domed between the ears and rounded at the forehead. The skull is about 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 about half the length of the muzzle. The muzzle is blunt, tapering only slightly toward the nose. The muzzle is parallel to the skull.

**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.



BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

**Lips:** The lips are tight and of black pigment. The inner corner of the mouth reaches back to a vertical line drawn down from the outside corner of the eye.

**Bite and Teeth:** The jaw is wide with a full complement of strong, evenly spaced, white teeth meeting in a scissors bite. The line of the incisors is straight and perpendicular to the outside lines of the jaw.

**Disqualifications:** Overshot, with a space greater than one eighth of an inch between the outer surface of the lower incisors and the inner surface of the upper incisors, or undershot.



**Neck:** The neck is strong, slightly arched, and, measured from the nape to the forward edge of the withers, should be about 20 percent shorter than the length of the head. There is no dewlap. The hair on the neck forms a thick collar.

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Teeth:** Typically, only the front teeth are examined in conformation shows.



**Neck:** In action the neck is carried forward with its upper profile almost a continuation of the top line with only a slight angle at the withers.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

**Body and Topline:** The Bergamasco is very slightly longer than tall, with the length of body measured from point of shoulder to point of buttocks about 5 to 6 percent longer than the height measured at the withers.

The line of the back inclines very slightly downward from prominent withers to a strong, broad back. The loin is well-muscled and broad. The croup is slightly sloping, about 35 degrees downward from the horizontal.



**Chest and Ribs:** The ribs are well-sprung and let down to the elbows. The depth of the rib cage is equal to half the dog's height at the withers.

**Tuck-up:** Tuck-up is nearly absent.

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD



**Body proportion and Topline:** A very important structural characteristic, affecting the Bergamasco Sheepdog locomotion for optimum efficiency while performing their tasks, is the importance of the length of the body.

It would be erroneous that the dog be square, meaning that the body length to be equal to the height at the withers.

If the square dog's proportions were to be applied to a Bergamasco, the body would be squeezed into unnatural proportions and a shortening of the pelvis. This would create an insufficient length of the hind angulation and, in consequence, hind lower limbs too long inefficient in uphill locomotion as the center of gravity rises.

A longer proportions of 10 to 20% longer than tall is just as incorrect as it would not be suitable for rapid ascent and for downhill. Such build being better suited for sheepdogs which work on flatter terrain covering larger distances instead of using power traction.. Bergamascos always carry out their work in mountainous regions so it needs a solid and compact build.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Tail:** The tail is natural and is uncut, thick at the base, and tapering to the tip. When the dog is in repose, the tail just reaches to the hock, with the bottom third of the tail forming a hook. When the dog is in action, the tail is raised in a curve with the crook raised above the level of the back.



In order to be most efficient in its environment, which requires work on steep hill, **the Bergamasco is best built with a difference of 5-6% between the two measurements (body length and height at the withers) without making the dog any less compact.**

**Tail:** It is worthwhile to add a few comments on tail carriage. In action it is spread out fanwise, and flagging. Carried above the back line and in the shape of an arc. If the croup is the right length with correct fallaway, so that the tail insertion is also on the right spot, high tail carriage should not be penalized. It is often considered a bad habit or a sign of exuberant character. On the other hand, if the croup is too short and the tail is incorrectly inserted, bad tail carriage is a result of a faulty insertion as a result of poor built.



BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Forequarters**

Shoulders: The shoulders are massive and strong. The shoulder blade is moderately laid back, about 60 degrees from the horizontal. The shoulder blades should be tightly knit.

**Upper Arm:** The upper arm is just slightly longer than the shoulder blade. The angle formed by humerus and shoulder blade is about 115 degrees.



**Forequarters:**

Shoulder blade is wide and long with 60 angulation from Horizontal; therefore the Humerus and radius are not too long surrounded by strong muscles. This is essential for a dog, which has to move both up and down hill where extra effort is required. Short humerus and radius and strong muscles are the best instrument to guarantee resistance and potency.

**A characteristic of the breed is a short humerus. The deltoid muscle and the great dorsal muscle which flex the humerus on the shoulder blade acts with greater power.**

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

**Forelegs:** The vertical forearm is about the same length as the upper arm and is placed so that the point of the elbow is on a vertical line falling from the tops of the shoulder blade.  
The elbows are neither close to the body nor out.  
The wrist 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 (10% from Vertical).



COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD



A characteristic of the breed is the short humerus a short axis. The combination of strong muscles and a short humerus are essential for a dog which moves up and down hill where extra effort is required.

**The similarly shorter length of the radius avoids the lift of the foot further than necessary, for preservation of energy and to keep gravity level low.**

Metacarpus must be short and angled at 80 from horizontal, sometimes giving the impression the dog is bracing when stacked. The abundant hair on the paws can accentuate that impression.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Hindquarters**

Pelvis slopes at 35° from horizontal.

**Upper Thigh:** The upper thigh is long, wide, and well muscled. The upper thigh slopes downward and forward at a 95 degree angle from the pelvis.

**Lower Thigh:** The lower thigh is as long as the upper, with strong bone and lean muscles. It slopes downward and backward, forming an angle of about 105-110 degrees at the stifle (femur-tibia). There is a well-defined furrow between the tendon and the bone above the hock.

**Hocks :** The distance from the point of hock to the ground is no less than 25 percent of the height at the withers. Viewed from behind, the rear pasterns should be 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 130-135 degrees.

**Feet :** Rear feet are the same as forefeet except slightly smaller. Rear dewclaws are removed.

**Hindquarters:** A broad and well developed Pelvis with a 35 to 40 angulation from horizontal is essential to support enough muscle mass for an efficient trotter suited for uphill powerful movement. Tibia and Femur are roughly the same length (due to axis of Pelvis) and better suited for locomotion over hilly territories.

**Due to the steeper inclination of the pelvis the rear extension of the Bergamasco is lesser than other breeds. Too much angulation is a sign of a shorter pelvis and longer limbs, this is better suited for flat terrain breeds where speed and stride width are more important than power.**



The Metatarsus is relatively short as well (25% of height). Rear toes pointing out area common as they add efficiency in rear traction in uphill movement. It is not a fault and are considered typical of the mountain working sheepdog.



## BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard (Herding Group)

### Coat :

The Bergamasco coat is made up of three types of hair: Undercoat, "goat hair," and outer coat. The undercoat is short, dense, and of fine texture. It is oily to the touch and forms a waterproof layer against the skin. The "goat hair" is long, straight, and rough in texture. The outer coat is woolly and somewhat finer in texture than the "goat hair." The "goat hair" and outer coat are not distributed evenly over the dog and it is this pattern of distribution that is responsible for the formation of the characteristic flocks (strands of hair weaved together creating flat layers of felted hair).



## COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD



- The size, texture and thickness of the flocks grow differently in each individual. Females can have a lighter coat and dogs under 4 years old have much shorter flocks and should not be penalized in the show ring as it is very slow growing. While the Bergamasco coat is extremely complex, the uniquely typical characteristics to remember are:
  - The distribution of the various type of hair over the body is not homogeneous. The withers have more goat hair and can be absent of flocks, while the rear section of the dogs has a vast amount of woolly hair.
  - **The overall look of the Bergamasco is that of a very rustic breed, the coat should NOT appear Brushed out.**
- Contrary to the Puli and Komondor coat (twisted soft woolly and corded), the Bergamasco "flocks" are large, often flat, irregular and sometimes opening fanwise.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

Each flock of hair ranges in width anywhere from inch and half to three inches wide. The coat from the withers down to the midpoint of the body is mostly "goat hair" which forms a smooth saddle in that region. On the back of the body and the legs, the woolly outer coat is abundant and mingles with the reduced quantity of "goat hair" in that region to form the flocks. The flocks are larger at the base than the end, flat, irregular in shape, and may sometimes open in a fan-shape. The hair on the legs also hangs in flocks rather than feathering. The flocks are never combed out. The hair on the head is mostly "goat hair" but is somewhat less rough in texture and hangs over the eyes.



COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD



- Because the goat hair is stiffer in texture, it forms wide thick meshes so that the woolly hair weaves through it instead of around itself, creating a woven felted texture.
- The top of the head is often "flock" free with smooth goat hair or with very thin flocks. Small flocks under the chin and on each side of the muzzle are present, getting progressively thicker towards the chest. The ears often grow long flocks.
- Females may have less coat than male, and often loose their coat after lactation, this should not be considered a fault.
- Due to the long growth process of the coat, young dogs coat should be appreciated for the stage of their age.
- **The Bergamasco's coat should never be shiny nor curly, nor appear overly groomed or brushed out\*.**

## COMMENTS ON THE COAT APPEARANCE

The Bergamasco is a natural breed, its appearance should be rustic and un-groomed. The Bergamasco Sheepdog Club of America (BSCA), AKC's parent Club, is responsible for preserving the integrity of the breed as unchanged from history and as natural as it could be. One should watch out for cases of overly groomed, clipped, brushed out, stylized and transformed Bergamascos (seen recently at UKC shows). Those atypical transformation are often to compensate for poor build and poor coats in dogs of lesser quality which cannot conform to AKC's breed standard. It is important that the correct natural appearance be preserved to maintain the integrity of the breed. Below are a comparison of this incorrect groomed version (left) next to the correct Bergamasco (right), **the brushed/clipped version should be considered a major fault in conformation shows (dogs under 9 to 12 months of age do not have flocks yet and should not be discriminated).**

### Incorrect and faulty grooming

### Correct style

#### Adults

Un-natural coat, and atypical adult dog

Brushed out and plucked hair on: head, neck, shoulders, chest, lower legs and tail

too short body length

too leggy

face brushed like a bearded pointer is atypical

Tall and lanky appearance

Natural coat, not brushed out, dog with correct type

head and withers can be naturally flock free abundant flocking throughout the body

correct body proportions

thin flocks on each side of the muzzle

Strong heavy bone dog with good structure, good bone, slightly longer than tall,

No cutting, trimming brushing or over grooming, dogs looks rustic and natural

COMMENTS ON THE COAT APPEARANCE

Incorrect and faulty grooming

Correct style

**Adult Head**

Long natural flock free top, thin flocks on beard and mustache

Brushed head,  
Short trimmed  
face



Tall, Lanky, brushed out



**Youngsters**  
(over 1 year of  
age after initial  
Flock formation)

Rustic, natural, good bone



BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Color:**

Solid gray or gradations of gray (including merle) up to and including solid black, provided it is not shiny or lustrous. Color also includes shadings only of Isabella and fawn at the lower part of flocks ( as a result of discoloration of old hair, not as a base color), Solid white is not allowed but white markings are acceptable if they cover no more than one-fifth of the body.

Fault: White on more than one-fifth of the total area of the body.



BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

**Gait**

Because a herding dog is required to be in constant motion while the flock is being driven, correct, efficient movement is essential. The natural and preferred gait for the Bergamasco to achieve a calm and balance movement while preserving energy is a free, extended, elastic (slow) trot, with both front and rear feet remaining close to the ground. Pasterns are supple and flex freely. When moving, the dog's head moves forward so that the head is nearly even with the backline.



Note on the gait:

To work in the steep terrain of the Alps, the shepherds favor a calmer, better-balanced dog for which speed is only important in rare occasions of sprint, no unpredictable action, but **a homogeneous, resistant and regular gait.**

Note that **due to its compact built, the Bergamasco's center of gravity is low and the feet move close to the ground to be most efficient in uphill terrain, while preserving resistance and efficiency. Because of its unique angulations of the fore and hind quarters, the Bergamasco's movement is very different than other herding breeds who tend to focus more on speed on flat terrain and have a longer extension of the limbs and higher footing off the ground than the Bergamasco. The Bergamasco's gait is more focused on resistance, strength and low gravity with feet closer to the ground. The movement can be slower than other herding dogs and they can break into leaps if speed or inclination changes.**

The Bergamasco's characteristic gait is not always correctly evaluated in the show ring. As a result, handlers with little experience with this breed have developed the bad habit of showing their dogs "strung up in the lead", forcing them to raise their heads too high and produce a high stepping "flowery" and absolutely atypical gait. This action much adored by some show competitors, while more "dramatic" and attractive to spectators, is completely unnatural and anti-productive from the point of view of energy waste and uphill efficiency for the built of the Bergamasco Sheepdog. It is important that the Bergamasco's neck not be too long and that the head not be carried high during movement. The motto: "The longer the step, the better the gait" should not be applied while handling a Bergamasco Sheepdog, and any artificial modification of the movement would prevent judges from appreciating the true qualities which the Bergamascos should possess.

Additionally, the Bergamasco sheepdog always works behind the shepherd to watch any hand gesture; therefore, it should be moved beside the handler without too much speed.

The correct presentation of a Bergamasco in movement should be with loose lead, a regular and calm speed, feet close to the ground, with the dog side by side or slightly behind the handler, both at the breed or group level.

BERGAMASCO SHEEPDOG Standard  
(Herding Group)

COMMENTS ON THE STANDARD

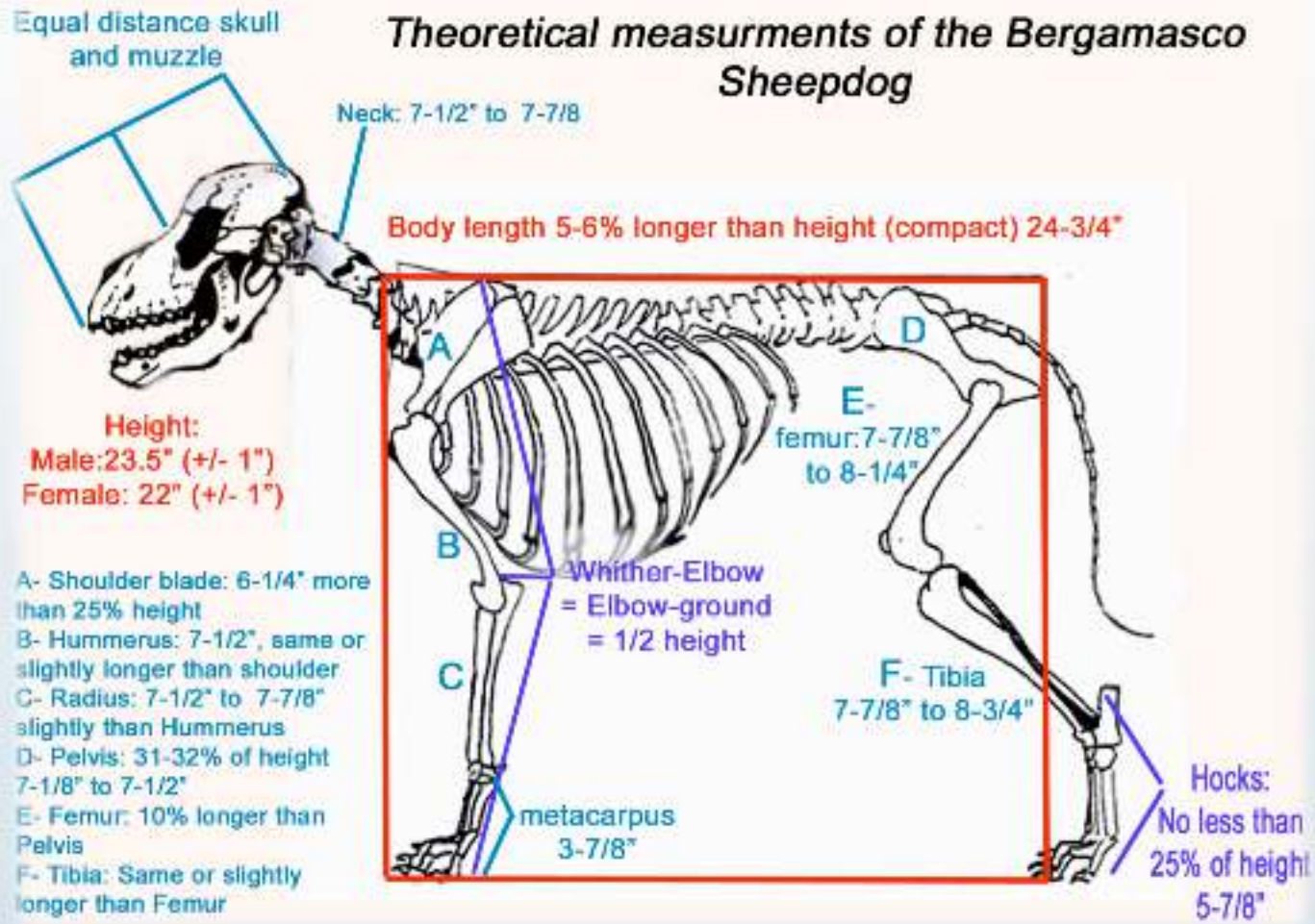
**Temperament**

The Bergamasco is a vigilant guard, with a strong protective instinct. It is naturally stubborn and will persevere with a task until done. The Bergamasco is a very intelligent animal, courageous but not aggressive without cause. The Bergamasco's patient, quiet, and eager-to-please nature makes him an excellent companion, but he requires a lot of space.

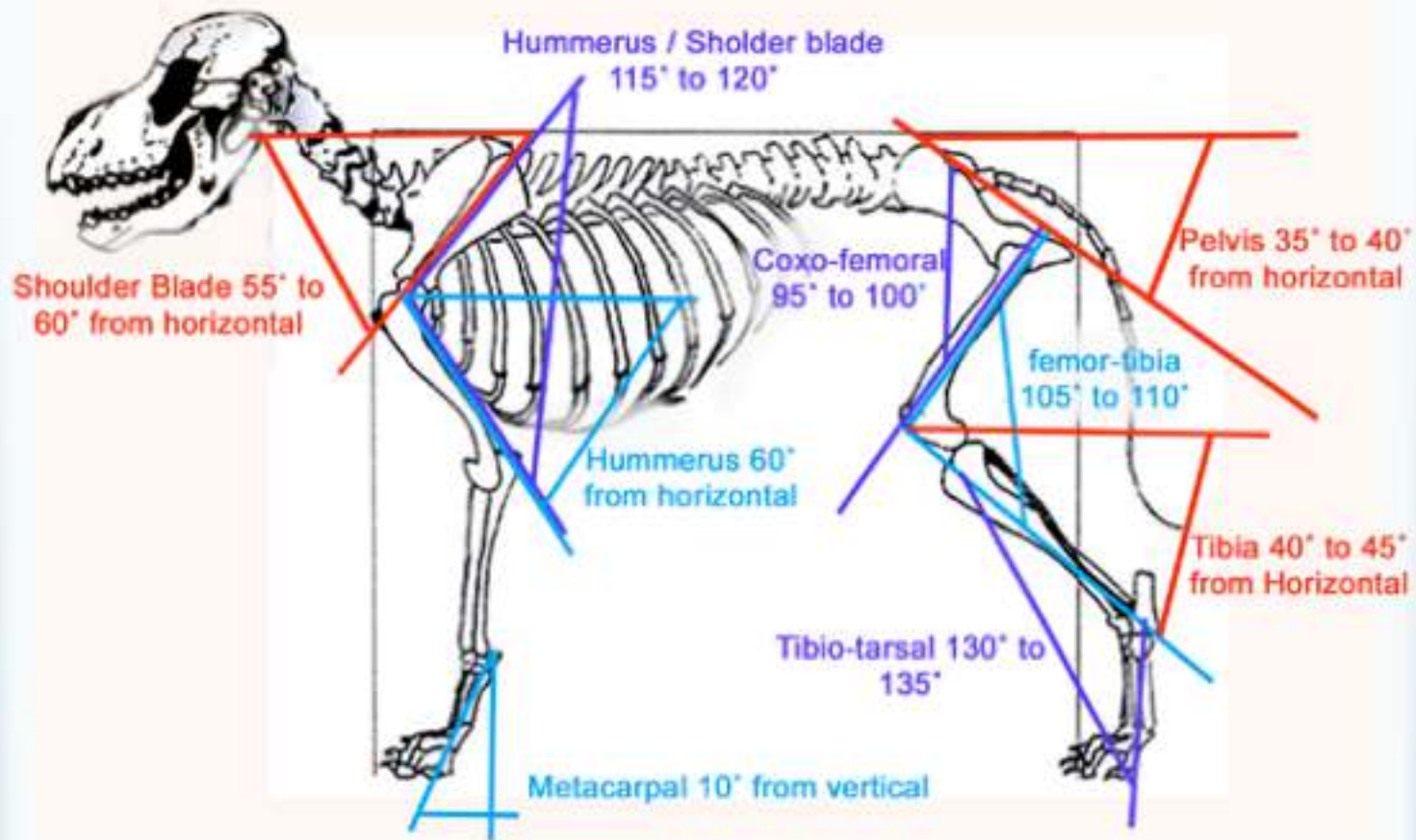




# Skeletal structure



## Angulations of the Bergamasco Sheepdog skeletal structure



## Size differences between the Bergamasco the Komondor and the Puli

length:

Bergamasco: 5-6% more than height

Komondor :slightly longer than tall

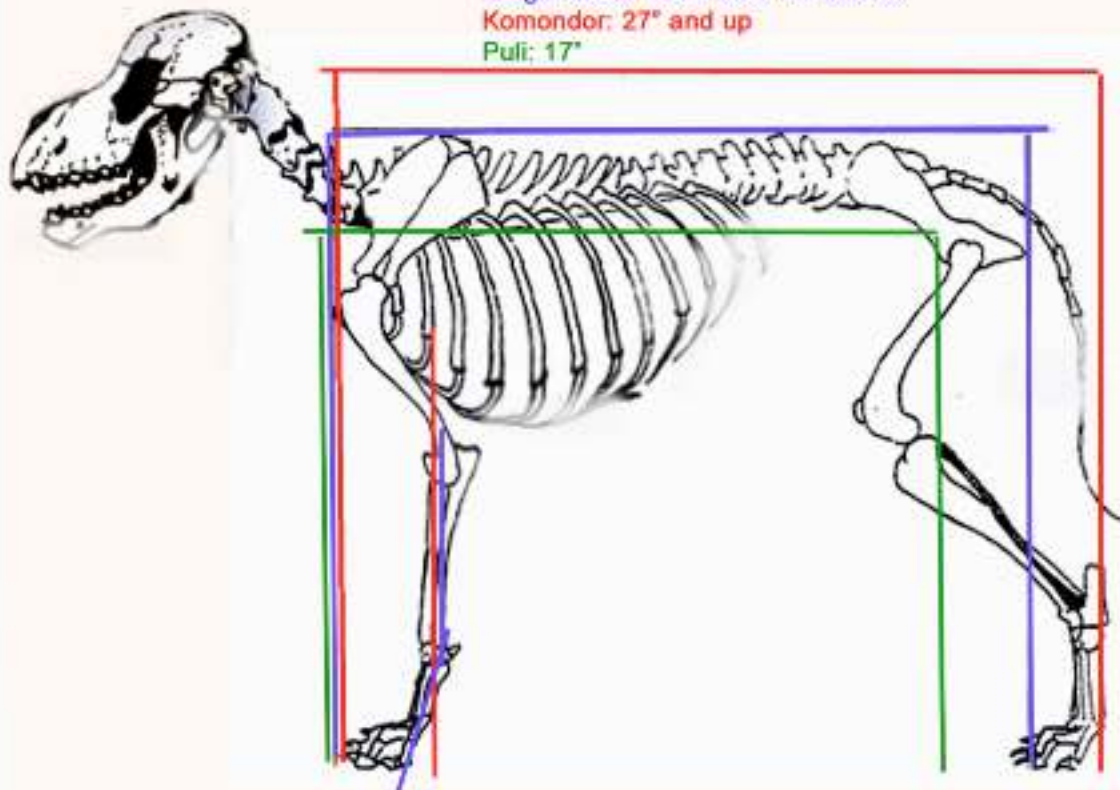
Puli : body approximates square

Height :

Bergamasco: male 23.5" female 22"

Komondor: 27" and up

Puli: 17"



Bergamasco: Metacarpal 10° from vertical

Komondor: Straight

## Angulation differences between the Bergamasco the Briard and the Bearded Collie

length:

Bergamasco: 5-6% more than height

Beardie : 5 to 4 ratio

Briard: Male equal to or slightly more than his height at the withers.

The female may be a little longer.

Hindquarters Pelvis:

Bergamasco: 35° to 40°

Briard: 30

Height :

Bergamasco: male 23.5° female 22°

Beardie : male 21-22 female 20-21

Briard: Male 23-27 female 22-25.5

Hindquarters Fenur:

Bergamasco: 95° to 100°

Briard: 90

Forquarters Soulder:

Bergamasco: 55° to 60°

Beardie : 45°

Briard: 45°

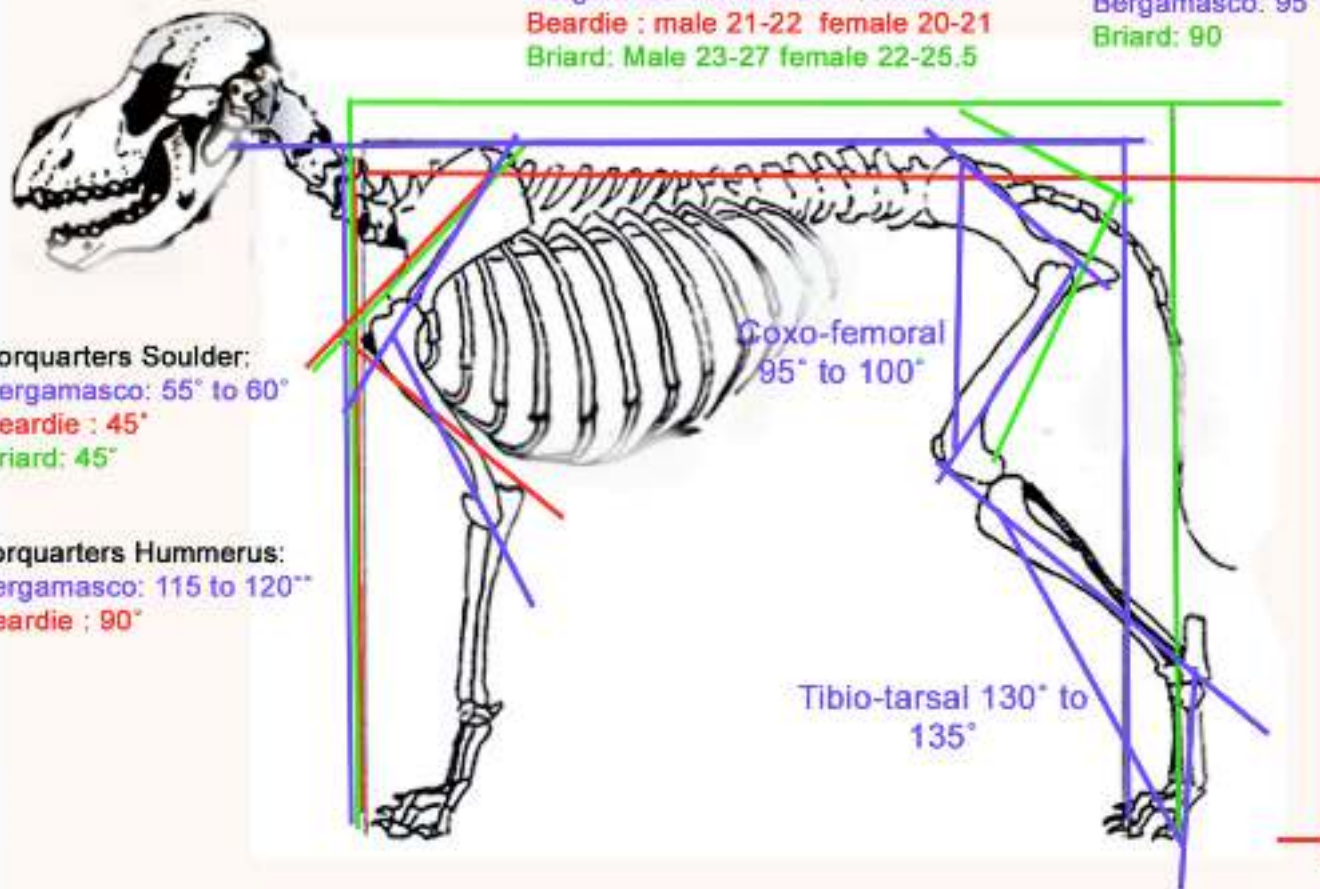
Forquarters Hummerus:

Bergamasco: 115 to 120°

Beardie ; 90°

Coxo-femoral  
95° to 100°

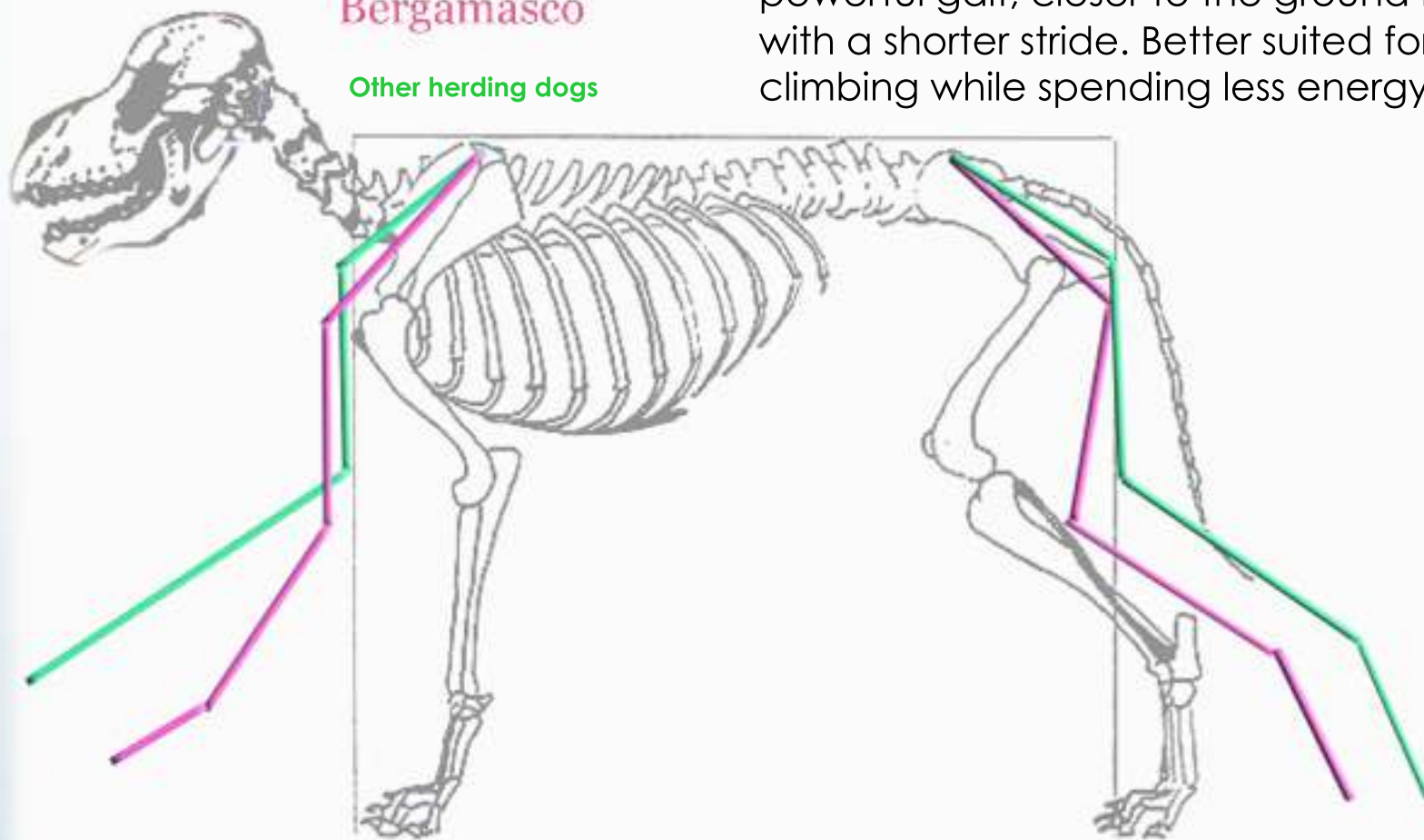
Tibio-tarsal 130° to  
135°



Bergamasco

Other herding dogs

A longer pelvis and shoulder blade with a steeper angulations create a more powerful gait, closer to the ground but with a shorter stride. Better suited for uphill climbing while spending less energy.



# Movement

Bergamasco are seen as mountain sheepdogs. Unique conditions affecting the gait are to be considered:



- Bergamascos do not walk beside the shepherd, but behind him in order to capture any gesture intended to spur it into actions.

- Sheep are timid in nature and tend to bolt when scared, the dogs job is to keep the upper hand without provoking panic in rough terrain.

- When the flocks moves, it is slowly with a tendency to disperse, the dogs had to walk along side the flock, moving back and forth with no specific need for great speed. On the contrary, the gait has to be slow and even requiring great resistance.





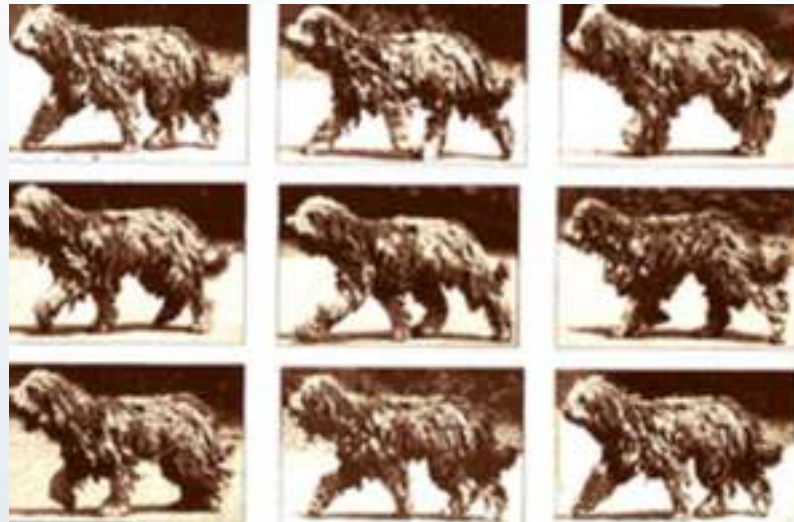
- When the grazing area are reach, the dogs had to keep an eye on the flock, so the sheep did not wander too far or run into danger by getting to close to ravines and cliffs. When intervention is indispensable, the dogs need to avoid brusque movements to avoid the sheep to panic with a full stomach or to fall in steep terrain.

- In 1781, G von Albertini von Tamins writes: *"When the weather is hot and dry, the shepherds travel at night, but absolutely none of the sheep ever gets lost thanks to their excellent sheepdogs (of the Bergamasco breed). These not only guard their master and the flocks against wolves, but partly replace the shepherds in managements of the animals."* A type of night sheep driving is done calmly and at low speed to keep the flock calm and together.



### **A calm, even trot:**

The dogs had to adapt to various ways of moving the flocks, 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. Since the sheep move slowly in mountainous terrain, the dog has no need for speed; on the contrary, its gait is slower and even. Every action is to be carried out with studied calm. Exuberant or highly strung dogs which move too fast or in an uncontrolled manner would have been totally useless for their job and made the shepherd's work more difficult. The shepherds favor a calmer, better-balanced dog, for which speed is only important in rare occasions of sprint, no unpredictable action, but a homogeneous, resistant and regular gait.



### **Leaping and pacing:**

As the flock has to be driven all daylong, the dog covers a considerable distance pacing; therefore it needs to be highly resistant. In mountain grazing grounds, grass is less abundant than in planes, the sheep has to stay on the move in order to find enough food.

Another important typical trait of the Bergamasco gait is his leaping, help by strong neck movement. Bergamascos will move at a trot, when the path becomes too steep, it either slows down or advances in leaps. This type of action has been erroneously defined as galloping or cantering. While the gallop consists of a regular succession of paw supports, leaps succeed each other with no specific rhythm. Furthermore, fore and hind legs are often together on the ground which is never the case in the gallop.



### **In the ring:**

It is important that the neck is not too long and that the **head is not carried high during movement**. The Bergamasco's characteristic gait is not always correctly evaluated in the show ring. As a result, some competitors have developed the bad habit of showing their dogs "strung up in the lead, forcing them to raise their heads and produce a high stepping "flowery" and absolutely a-typical gait. This action is one the "fanciers" much adore by show competitors. "The longer the step, the better the gait" is contradictive with the natural built of the Bergamasco with its unique long shoulder and pelvis, the steeper inclinations of those bones and lesser rear angulation.

If this type of gait is more "dramatic" and attractive to spectators, it is completely unnatural and anti-productive from the point of view of energy waste and uphill efficiency.

Artificial modification prevents a judge from appreciating the qualities, which the dog should possess.

**The correct presentation of a Bergamasco in movement should be with loose lead, with the dog side by side or slightly behind the handler (the Bergamasco sheepdog usually always working behind the shepherd to watch any hand gesture). Bergamasco move relatively slower than other herding breeds, due to their built made for resistance up and downhill.**



CH Jupiter Dell Albera Silver Rebel  
USA, International CH, and World Champion World Show  
Sweden 2008



# The coat

The Bergamasco's coat is extremely complex and we will point out uniquely typical characteristics, The overall look of **the Bergamasco is that of a very rustic and natural dog, the coat should NOT appear brushed out or fluffed like that of other long hair breeds:**

- \* The coat is made up of three types of hair ( not fur and is considered to be non-shedding): Undercoat, "goat hair," and wooly outer coat.
- \* The "goat hair appears in abundance between 9 months to a year of age and weaves with the woolly hair to create the flocks.
- \* **Contrary to the Puli and Komondor coat (twisted soft wooly corded), the Bergamasco "flocks" is large, often flat, irregular and sometimes opening fanwise. The hair does not cord, (cording is the twisting of hairs together to create a spiral strand). The Bergamasco coat is very different of that of corded breeds, in that the strands of hair weave together creating flat layers of hair, more felt like. The definition of a flock is a tuft or lock of wool or hair. Each flock of hair ranges in width anywhere from ½ inch to three inches wide depending of area of the body.**



\* The distribution of the various type of hair over the body is not homogeneous. The withers have more goat hair, while the rear section of the dogs has a vast amount of wooly hair which weaves with the goat hair in thicker flocks.

\* The top of the head can be “flock” free with smooth goat hair or with very thin flocks. Small thin flocks under the chin and on each side of the muzzle are present, getting progressively thicker towards the chest. The ears often grow long flocks.

\* Females have much less coat than male, and often loose their coat after lactation, this should not be considered a fault.

\* Due to the long growth process of the coat, young dogs coat should be appreciated for the stage of their age.

\* Coat should never be shinny nor curly, and **never brushed out like a beardie nor artificially plucked around the neck, chest and shoulders. The appearance should not look overly groomed.**



Three stages of coat development

Three stages of coat development



In the Eastern European breeds, such as the Komondor and Puli, the coat consists mainly of woolly hair with relative little goat hair. The opposite is true for the Western European breeds, Briards and Catalanian Sheepdogs, for example, have coats mainly of goat hair. The Bergamasco, geographically between them would seem to form a bridge between these two groups with a coat in which both type of hair are presents in almost equal quantities, although differently distributed.

It is hard to say whether this geographic concomitance is a coincidence or whether it as a deeper significance involving climatic and selective factors. The fact remains that the Bergamasco is the only one of these breeds with this distinguished characteristic, which makes the breed particularly interesting from and historical and evolutionary aspect.

# Colors and Genetics

## Genetic sequence of Locus in the Bergamasco Sheepdog:

Genetically, the only accepted color in this breed is solid black (including grayed/lighten black and diluted/merled black). Neither brown, sable, tawny nor the black spotted. The genetic table of the Bergamasco breed is represented as follow:

As	B	C	D	E	G	M	S	t
					g	m		

**As:** all over dark, produces black without any tan on the dog (agouti series)

**B:** in single or double dose, allows the production of black pigment (brown series)

**C:** allows full expression of whatever pigment is prescribed by other genes. (albino series)

**D:** full intense pigmentation, **D** in combination with **B** is black (dilution series)

**E:** extension of the dark pigment, preventing masking and brindle in conjunction with **A** (extension series)

**G** and **g:** graying of the coat : **G**, not graying: **g** (graying series)

**M** and **m:** **M** is merling and **m** is uniform coloring (merle series)

**S:** white spotting (tips), mostly as puppies (white spotting series)

**t:** lack of ticking (ticking series)



**Black:** A majority of puppies born black however, develop a progressive lightening of the coat during growth, such diverse variation is a coat in any gradations of grey, from the grey anthracite to the lightest of grey.

Such effect is due to the presence of the allele **G**.



**Merle:** Only heterozygote Merle combination **Mm** is accepted in the bergamasco. The merle gene determines a coat in which the back color black comes in part diluted to grey, not in an uniform and complete manner, so there are also “black” undiluted. The result is a grey coat with black markings.

In this type of heterozygote combination, the effects of such allele limit themselves to a partial decrease of pigmentation of the coat and does not involve nor the pigmentation of the eyes, nose nor of the rhymes of the eyelids and lips.



Homozygote merling (**MM**) is a fault as the lack of pigmentation in these individuals is massive. Multiple large white markings appear on the coat, while the black almost completely disappears, the result is a grey coat with white markings. One or both eyes are blue, the nose is all or partially pink and the rhymes of the lips and eyelids present considerable zones of de-pigmentation. In addition to these obvious outwards signs, the hearing system is often defective, with partial or total deafness and many individuals are sterile, particularly bitches.

### Colors:



Merle with darkwe base color



Merle with lighter base color



Black stayed dark

Black turned medium gray

Black lighten to light gray

### Explanation of the terms: Isabella, tawny and light fawn shades:

Bergamascos are only able to produce eumelanin pigments (black without any tan on the dog). They do not produce any pheomelanin (which is predominantly tan, and responsible for red/yellow pigments). Therefore the breed cannot be brown, tawny, sable or any color in that family.

The word "shades" used in the standard is not a real color. What the standard really means is that under the influence of sun and water and atmospheric factors in general as well as ageing of the hair, the loose hairs, which form part of the map mass, gradually change color: the grey hairs turn yellowish while the black ones take on a tawny hue. This is what causes the Isabella, brown hues and light fawn shades visible in the coats of adult dogs. **If the maps are lifted up and the hair examined at its roots, close to the skin, the coat is either grey or black.**

**Note that the Isabella colors from the root out is not accepted in the standard (below)**





*Champion Gallery*



*Trulla/world 1992*



*Zecchino/world 1994*



*Latona/world 1983*



*Onor/world 1982*



*Brio/Intl Ch 1994*



*Daidampa/Intl Ch 1996*



*Morgana/Intl Ch 1984*



*Fonzie/Intl Ch 1998*



*Parsifal/Intl Ch 1986*



*Mirra/Italian 1984*



*Florinda/Intl Ch 2005*



*Jupiter/world 2008*