

**Information Brochure
Dutch Bernese Mountain Dog Club
Nederlandse Berner Sennen Vereniging
(NBSV)**



History

In the late Middle Ages farmers started to work the forested highlands of the Swiss Alps to obtain pasture land for their cattle. Guarding the cattle was done by a "Kuher" or "Senner", who was paid to look after the cattle and who had to deliver the milk, butter and cheese to the owner of the mountain pasture.

During wintertime the cattle would stay in the valley in the stables of the various owners.

A herd of cattle consisted frequently of around 100 milk cows as well as numerous goats and pigs. The roads were bad and frequently led through rivers and streams. Without their dogs, named "Senner dogs" a large herd of cattle impossibly could be kept together.

Obviously, there was not a clear distinction between "Senner dogs" and "farms dogs". During seven months of the year the Senner lived in the valley and during five months he stayed on the mountain pastures. Mixing of blood was unavoidable.

As the farmer dogs and cattle dogs were thus mixed for many centuries and most probably came from the same litters, it is not surprising that the Bernese Mountain Dogs not only possess guarding and protecting skills but also strong herding skills.



Only since the beginning of the twentieth century the Bernese Mountain Dog started to be purely bred out of farm dogs from the canton of Bern. It is suspected that because of the isolated location of their homes the breed has been untouched for many centuries and is therefore a very old breed. However, no one knows how old exactly. Many farmers from the canton of Bern were reasonably well off and they could afford to keep large dogs. Their farms were large and the old agricultural rights prevented that the ground was split in many smaller parts. On top of that, the taxes in this area were not very high and the region was able to stay out of violence of war for a long time.

At that time, such farm dogs were supposed to be merely useful dogs that had to deliver certain duties. Last but not least they were also slaughtered, as it was believed that dog fat was an excellent medicine.

From many tales it is known that the farmers gave their dogs names, like "Bäri" which was the name for a dog without a white blaze on the face, "Ringgi" for dogs with a white ring around the neck, "Bläss" was often used for dogs with a white blaze on the face, "Gelbbäcker" for dogs with a lot of yellow on the cheeks, "Vieräugler" for dogs with yellow markings above the eyes as well as "Dürrbachhund" or "Dürrbächler" which means dog from Dürrbach, the little town in Switzerland where these dogs originally were found.

The centuries long existence as cattle dog and farm dog shaped the Bernese Mountain Dog into a dog that earned respect. The variety of purposes led to a well proportioned body without exaggerations, a bodily shape that did not allow strong alterations from the normal shape of a dog. And this was also true for its character. The farmers of the Senner were not willing nor had time to deal with a nervous dog or one with other unwanted

habits. We can read how these dogs were bred in the "Zentralblatt für Jagd- und Hundeliebhaber" from 1913: "The Senner, farmers and cattle merchants bred only with extremely healthy material; those that could not work, run, herd and bark a full day in all kinds of weather and were still awake at guard at night, were castrated or beaten to death".



Still today we find those valuable characteristics in the Bernese Mountain Dogs. For instance he holds a close tie with his people and the place where he lives without being reserved. With friendly attention he follows everything that is happening around him. He pointedly makes distinction between people he knows and daily events and things that are uncommon. Uncommon things and strange people he reports in a dependable way and if necessary he is willing to defend his people and their possessions.

Biddable and happily, though with a certain touch of independence, he will carry out the duties assigned to him. A sensitive and soft character is hidden behind his robust appearance.

The Standard

Beside several other breeds, four kinds of Sennen Dogs originate from Switzerland: the Bernese, the Appenzeller, the Entlebucher and the Great Swiss.

All four have black shiny coats with reddish-brown marking on their cheeks, above their eyes, on their legs and on their chest. Remarkable is the white cross on the chest and the white blaze as well as white paws and white tip to tail.

The Bernese Mountain Dog is the only one of the four Sennen Dogs with long hair. His bushy tail is carried hanging or slightly wavy but never curled or carried over the back. The size for male dogs is 64 to 70 cm and for bitches 58 to 66 cm. The Bernese usually has a quiet and friendly character, alert without too much barking and on top of that an excellent working dog and family dog. Besides his beautiful appearance it is the fine character of this farm dog that does appeal to the modern and rushed mankind, making it one of the most popular breeds of our time.

Albert Heim, the expert of the Sennen breeds once wrote the following sentences about the character of the Bernese Mountain Dog: "According to a farmer a dog is a good dog when he is alert and sharp without will to bite, following at the foot when walking with his master and between the wheels when going out with horse and wagon and not through the verge of the road, defending his master when needed, guarding possessions that have been lost in the field, does not poach, leaves chickens and cats alone and does not wander about".

A fine Bernese Mountain Dog is usually a loyal companion of school children and learns how to fetch, carry a basket and all kinds of other skills that he was not born with. The dogs are very attentive; they notice everything and show evidence of being very



intelligent. They have a happy-go-lucky nature and are active outdoors, they adore people, full of love and loyalty and just like the other Sennen dogs very trustworthy.

The Sennen dogs have always been multi-purpose dogs that were adaptable to many tasks. Primarily for herding and guiding the stock of cattle and searching for lost cattle. They were so good at this that they were able to replace two shepherds. For instance they were able to distinguish their own

cattle from that of others and prevent a stock of getting mixed with another. They did that by using their scent and hearing. Dogs have excellent hearing capabilities.

Bernese Mountain Dogs were very attached to the home where they were living and are still today. They are typical yard dogs that hardly cross the boundaries of their own yard. Apart from that, the Bernese were often used to pull the milk cart in Switzerland and so taking care of delivering the milk at the cheesery with or without guidance. In Switzerland this task is still performed by the Bernese today. Drafting (carting) by dogs is forbidden by law in the Netherlands.

Nowadays, the Bernese Mountain Dog is mostly kept as a family dog and is not used as a working dog much more. However, the herding and guiding instinct is still in his blood. You can see this for instance when a group of people (family , friends or relatives) is taking a walk. The dog(s) will constantly try to keep the group together.

Sennen dogs are, like all kinds of shepherds, very loyal to their family. The more contact the Bernese has with "his people", the more his good characteristics are developed. He is very alert without will to bite.

If something should happen to one of his family , the Bernese will protect him with lots of energy. He also likes to be around children. He is always friendly and patient towards children. His instinct to protect them is very well developed. However, you have to watch out that children do not tease or harass him. In that case even the friendliest Bernese may not want to be around children for the rest of his life.

Most Bernese are friendly to their fellow Berners. One hardly ever sees two competitors barking aggressively at one another. It is also claimed that a group of Bernese that do not know each other can walk and play with one another very well.



Despite a lot of prejudices, the Bernese is a dog that is capable to perform a variety of dog sports. You have to make sure, though, that he is fully matured before starting physically demanding exercises.

As far as hunting is concerned, it is claimed that Bernese do not hunt. However, like with so many things, exceptions confirm the rule. Most Bernese have no ambition for hunting. However, there are a few that could be used very effectively for hunting. So watch your young dog carefully and suppress any hunting desire as early as possible. Unfortunately this will not be successful in all cases. In that case you have to keep your dog on a leash when you make a forest walk in areas with game.



Grooming

Moulting shedding is the change of the old coat for a new one. Male dogs usually shed their coats once a year; mostly the time of year when it gets warmer outside. Female dogs shed their coats twice a year before they are in season and also after they had a litter.

Bernese Mountain Dogs have long coats, which means that they have a long top coat as well as an under coat.

In case the dog sheds its coat more than once or twice per year this can have a variety of causes. For instance:

- wrong nutrition;
- too much grooming;
- bathing too often.

However, there can also be other causes of a physical nature. In that case a veterinarian should find out what the reason for this is.

Other than top coat and under coats, dogs also have so called sinus hair. These are located mostly on the lips and are quite long, strong and sturdy. A lot of sinew ends are located at the root of these hairs. These hairs are the dog's sense organs of touch and should never be cut off!!!

The coat can be *brushed/combed* with a slicker brush, a soft hairy brush or with a comb. When using a slicker brush one has to watch not to comb too much or too long otherwise the good hairs will be pulled out and the dog will be casting more than necessary. The slicker brush is ideal to also brush down at the root of the hair; a soft hairy brush is usually not able to go so deep into the coat.

Always brush with the lie of the hair. Start at the head, particularly the long hairs on and behind the ears should be combed carefully as this is a place where knots are easily developed. Put the ear on one hand and brush the ear with the other hand. Then brush the body of the dog. Also the under coat should be brushed carefully. The long hairs



on the front legs are better combed than brushed. The long hairs on the hind legs need to be brushed and combed carefully too as knits do easily occur in these places. Finally, the tail should be brushed. Most dogs find this the least pleasurable part of the grooming. A little bit of conditioner spray does miracles when grooming the tail. It makes the tail much easier to brush and therefore it is much more pleasant for the dog.

The dog has so called anal glands. These are two small sacks situated on each side in the anus. In the sacks one finds anal secretion, which smells very foul, and used to be to keep attackers at bay. These glands have lost their usage and now sometimes cause the openings to the sacs to become blocked. Over full anal glands will cause the dog to continuous nagging, biting and licking at the tail region. Also they drag themselves along the ground. Dogs with overfull glands are best taken to a vet who will empty the glands in a few seconds.

How to Choose a Puppy

You have already studied some literature about the breed. You are aware of the possible problems and you know how much time a dog will take from you. Still you have decided to purchase a Bernese Mountain Dog puppy. Not just for the kids, but for yourself. Because such a puppy and later on this (very) large dog will give you a lot of love and companionship.

But what to do now? Where do you find a fine Bernese Mountain Dog puppy with the least chance of problems? A breeder can never give you 100% guarantee that a puppy will grow up healthily. Since we are talking about living creatures, of course they can become ill (as no doctor can guarantee the parents of a new born baby that their child will never become sick...).

What you can do, though, is try to diminish the chance of physical or other problems as much as possible. Please remember when you are purchasing a puppy, that you are getting a dog that will be your companion for approximately the next 10 years. You can, no you even should make high demands when you choose a puppy.

- Visit a number of breeders. Listen to what they have to say. Compare!
- Do not go alone but take someone with you. Tell the other person to refrain you from making an impulsive buy.
- Never purchase a puppy on your first visit.

Preferably do not visit a breeder where there are puppies ready to take home with you. The sight of these adorable puppies may tempt you to an impulsive purchase. Your dog deserves better than that. He will be your companion for the next ten years (or more) and deserves at least a careful choice.



- Don't hesitate to ask the breeder a lot of information. Also ask to be shown written proof of the official papers. Don't allow excuses like the papers are lost or the dog has had a little accident, or something like that. If the breeding dog has indeed had a little accident a serious breeder will be able to show you an affidavit from the veterinarian of this.

Things that you can ask the breeder are:

First of all it is important that the dogs grow up in the home. Dogs that grow up in a barn, shed or kennel usually have more difficulty in adapting to unfamiliar surroundings. They are less used to the presence of people and to all the strange household noises. A puppy should obtain these impressions during the first 6 or 7 weeks of his life. If a puppy does not get enough impressions or negative impressions, then this can become a disadvantage for the rest of his life. Such a dog stays more on guard and frightened and consequently is less reliable.

- Make sure that the puppies and their surroundings are clean and well kept.
- Look carefully at the mother dog. See if she pleases you. The puppies receive half of their hereditary characteristics from her.

Even more so, the puppies' behaviour is fully determined by the mother dog during the first couple of weeks.

- Ask for the papers of the parent dogs and ask why the breeder has chosen for this combination. Why did he use this stud dog and not another one? Watch out for stories like: "This nice dog from next door" or "that great champion..." (champions are also born out of parents that are less good and a champion as a parent does not give any guarantees to purchase a future champion...).



These are no good arguments to use a particular stud dog. A good breeder takes into consideration:

- Health of the parent dogs.
- Health of the ancestors.
- Health of earlier descendants of the stud dog (and bitch).
- Kinship between stud dog and bitch. It has become apparent from studies that there is more chance to healthy dogs when the stud dog and bitch are not related to each other. Also there should be as little kinship between the ancestors as possible. (Ask for an overview that goes back at least six generations).
- Other than that a good breeder will tell you about the strong points of his brood bitch as well as the lesser points. He will also have given this consideration when selecting the stud dog. A breeder's objective is to improve these lesser points (and maintaining the strong points) by making the right combination.

You can ask for the following documents: (documents change in the course of years. Therefore, it can happen that you find old and new documents and forms at the same time.)

1. Firstly you ask for a copy of the pedigree of both the stud dog and the brood bitch.
2. Secondly you ask for the results of the Hip Dysplasia (HD) X-rays. The HD results say something about the hips of the parent dogs.

3. You also should ask for the results of the ED X-rays. The ED results say something about the elbows of the parent dogs. Bad elbows can be the cause of lameness of the forelegs.
4. Also ask for the documents of the breeding tests. The Dutch Bernese Mountain Dog Club requires from their breeders that their dogs are submitted to the behaviour test and have obtained at least twice the qualification Very Good on a CAC(IB) dog show.

After you have concluded your research and you have found a breeder from whom you want to buy your puppy , it is also good sense to conclude the terms and conditions in a purchase contract.

The NBSV

A number of breeders and owners of Bernese Mountain Dogs established the Dutch Bernese Mountain Dog Club (NBSV) at the end of _000 in order to protect the breed.

Objectives of the NBSV are as follows:

- a. Promoting the hobby of keeping and breeding purebred Bernese Mountain Dogs.
- b. Guarding against any actions that may harm the quality of the breed.
- c. Informing the market, which means giving objective information and providing assistance to potential buyers.
- d. Establishing an international network.
- e. Establishing a well functioning club archive.

Our club has two kinds of members: ordinary members (who have the choice to receive the club magazine by ordinary mail or by email) and family members. It goes without saying that we also organize a number of

events. These events are partially recreational and partially informative. You can find information about these events and about all kinds of other interesting things on our web site and in our club magazine, which comes out five times per year. All members automatically receive this magazine filled with information about the Bernese Mountain Dog. The Breeding Information Centre (FIC) gathers information concerning breeding. Here you can find answers to your questions related to breeding and in case you want to see a Bernese or have questions about purchasing a puppy , here you can get addresses from breeders.



You can obtain more information about the NBSV:

- on internet: www.bernernennenhond.nl.
- by email: address: info@bernernennenhond.nl.
- from the PR commission: Conny Kouwenhoven, phone +31-(0)346 - 58 05 58 (after 19.00 hours).
- from the membership administration: Van Pallandtlaan 9, 3853 EN Ermelo, the Netherlands, phone: +31-(0)341 - 56 14 77.
- or from the secretary: Langeland 19, 1679 WG Midwoud, the Netherlands, phone +31 (0)6 – 386 30 730.