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Introduction

Loyalty. Unconditional love. Companionship. A nurturing nature. These are just a few of the amazing characteristics you'll discover when you allow an Australian Shepherd into your heart and your home.

An Australian Shepherd is not only one of the most beautiful canines you'll ever encounter, he's also one of the most loving. I can see why you're considering adopting this breed. He would make the perfect companion for you and your family.

Or would he? While he's loving and loyal, he also hails from hardy working stock. He was bred during a time when dog breeders were searching for a better working dog, not a more beautiful one.

So what does this mean to you? You'll truly understand once you bring your new "Aussie" home. The first thing you'll learn about him is that he's an active dog. A dog who can't help but herd children and other small dogs. He's also a nurturing dog. He simply adopts others - both dogs and people -- and loves them.

Being an active dog, it's especially important that he gets room, your time, and your patience.

What This Book Is All About

That's exactly what this book is all about. Its purpose is not only to show you how to be the very best Australian Shepherd parent you can be, but to help you make that final leap into ownership. We'll ask you some questions about your lifestyle, about your environment, and about your own level of physical activity.

All aspects of your life are important in determining your suitability for sharing your life with one of the most remarkable dogs you'll ever meet.

It's a fact! Everyone loves an Aussie -- how can you not? But not every family is suited to own one. Are you?

It's a question you need to deal with honestly. Owning this tremendous breed is far too large a commitment and responsibility to enter into without considerable research under your belt.

Once You've Decided . . .

. . . that the Aussie is your perfect dream dog and you've made that commitment, then this book takes you through every important facet of your dog's life -- from how to choose your first puppy, to caring for your older Aussie.

The Ultimate Guide to Australian Shepherds talks not only about "puppy proofing" your home prior to bringing your Aussie home, but also helps you understand his nutritional needs, his unique health conditions, and how to housebreak and train him.

And because he can be such an active dog, we've also included a section on how to help keep him physically active. You'll definitely appreciate some of these suggestions.

And, oh, by the way... the Australian Shepherd ***did not*** originate in The Land Down Under. Surprised? I sure was. But keep on reading. The following chapter details this breed's history -- and tries to understand exactly how this dog got his name.

1

The Aussie's Family Tree

***Discover the story behind the name “Australian Shepherd.”
You may be surprised about its origins.***

The Australian Shepherd. Just the name makes my imagination run wild. I envision a hard-working dog from Down Under, who undoubtedly barks with that remarkable Australian accent.

So imagine how I felt when that entire scenario was dismantled in a matter of seconds.

Sure, he's a hard-working dog who lives to herd (as you'll soon discover when you have your very own), but don't expect him to bark with that Australian accent. Why? Because despite that descriptive name, the dog breed didn't develop and evolve in Australia.

Hard to believe, isn't it? But it's true. To fully understand how this beautiful shepherd got its name, we have to delve into the history.

When Dog Were Working Members of the Family

As you look back, you'll discover that one of the most vital roles a dog ever held in a family was that of a helper with the livestock. But they performed any number of roles, depending on the breed.

For example, some dogs were bred specifically to guard the livestock from predators. Other dogs had a unique talent for herding the animals and keeping them together. And some canines showed talents for doing both.

Don't think these traits were produced overnight, though. It took generations of breeding for these qualities to shine in the various dogs.

When the Europeans came to settle in America, you could see why they brought along their working dogs. After all, many of them brought their livestock as well.

Depending on the country the settlers came from -- or even the region of their native land -- they brought any number of various breeds of herding and guard dogs, from the English Shepherd to the Welsh Grey Sheepdog from Wales.

I'm sure you can see where this is going. America has always been called a "melting pot" for immigrants. In much the same way, this country soon became a "melting pot" for various breeds of dogs as well!

Shepherds West!

For the longest time in the history of this nation, the livestock -- usually sheep -- and the shepherd dogs remained in the eastern portion of the nation. Remarkably, this area resembled the native European lands from which the immigrants came.

The western portion of the country was totally different. The land was harsher, the heat -- especially in the arid southern regions -- far hotter than what the immigrants or their working dogs had known.

By vivid contrast, the northwestern part of the nation was bone-chillingly cold. This was not anything like the climates that the European immigrants were accustomed to.

But the southern and California coastal regions soon became home to Spanish settlers, as well as their Spanish shepherd dogs. Initially, there weren't many -- settlers or dogs -- in terms of numbers. And the dogs themselves were quite different from their hardworking cousins of the east.

That may have been the end of the story had it not been for one word: "Gold!" Indeed, the Gold Rush of 1849 enticed all sorts of settlers to California in search of riches.

And at that point, we can see the beginning of the Australian Shepherd. With the large numbers of people venturing into the rugged west, came large numbers of sheep. These were driven not only from the Midwest, but from the southwest of the nation as well.

The sheep population grew. And one of the quickest ways to multiply their numbers was through the importation of sheep from... Australia. Many of these sheep were accompanied by sheepdogs, but they were nothing like today's Australian Shepherd. Certainly, they had begun to be bred for their capabilities

to work in rugged regions -- which, incidentally, were not unlike the terrain of the American West.

The West Needed Herding Dogs

Eventually, as the need for dogs in the west grew, the dogs were bred to meet the unique conditions of the west. These included blinding storms as well as temperatures that fluctuated from sweltering and nearly unbearable heat to a frigid cold.

But that's not all that the dogs needed. They also needed near instantaneous reaction times to not only the movements of the sheep, but to their owners' voices and commands as well.

At the same time, the successful shepherd of the American west was also required to act independently and think for himself. This is a tall order for one breed of dog, no matter how you look at it.

As you might guess, what came from this long list of requirements was a dog perfectly suited to the rugged and conflicting conditions of the American west. And he became known as the Australian Shepherd. He was certainly given a creative name, but not one that tells you much about his origins.

From Worker to Companion...

The truth is, no one really knows why or how this breed got dubbed as "Australian." Oh yes, to be sure, there are some theories. One of the most popular of these posits that these dogs actually accompanied Basque shepherders who arrived from Australia. Once here, they formed the central core of the herding dogs of the western United States.

While this sounds plausible on the surface, once you dig at some facts, you see that this theory is probably not correct. Most of the Basque shepherders who arrived in this country in the nineteenth century actually came by way of Europe and Latin America.

It wasn't until the twentieth century that they came here through Australia. By that time, the Australian Shepherd as a breed was already well established.

Perhaps we get closer to the truth if we take a better look at the sheepdogs the Australians brought with them. While certainly not as agile as today's Aussies, they did have a certain color -- what the breed calls "merle" -- about them. Merle is a bluish-grey color mottled with black.

Ghost-Eyed Aussies

It's possible that people just started calling any dog with those markings Australian Shepherds, regardless of the breed. This theory also works well with what we know about the dog's relationship to the Native Americans of the west.

These people thought the eye color of this dog so strikingly beautiful that they believed that the Australian Shepherd, which they called a "ghost-eyed" animal, to be sacred. They avoided contact not only with the dogs, but with those who owned the dogs as well.

Regardless of the origin of their name, as the need for these kinds of dogs grew, the Aussie stepped up to fill it. They soon became an invaluable ranch hand. They were quick, hardy, and tireless. But more than that, they were obedient and intelligent. And they possessed one other important trait-- they were pretty much "weatherproof."

But for all of their versatility, stamina, and agility, this dog wasn't viewed as true breed. Instead, many considered the Aussie a strain of canine.

To be honest, for the longest time, the Aussie was not even well known outside of the western portion of the United States, or even once you stepped off the working ranches.

The Rise of the Aussie... Thank Jay Sisler

But all that began to change in the mid-twentieth century. Enter Jay Sisler. He took the innate intelligence of the dog, as well as his agility and pure athleticism, into another realm. During the 1950s and 1960s, these dogs began touring with rodeos as trick dogs.

And as luck would have it, even the Australian Shepherd received a big film "break." An Aussie was cast in the classic Disney movie *Run Appaloosa Run*, and another one starred in a film called *Stub: The Greatest Cowdog in the West*.

From there, it didn't take long for these dogs to gain popularity. Dog lovers actually travelled west to see them in rodeos. Many individuals then brought an Aussie home with them. It seemed the nation was enamored with this intelligent canine. So it's not surprising that many of Australian Shepherds living today can trace their lineage back to those owned originally by Sisler.

The Australian Shepherd Club of America

At about the same time, the Australian Shepherd Club of American (ASCA) was formed. The year was 1957. This single act alone did quite a bit to raise the fame and the ability of this dog.

By 1971, many owners wanted their dogs to participate in a variety of competitive venues in addition to the herding trials. Six years later, a breed standard was created and approved.

All that was left to declaring the Aussie a legitimate breed was recognition by the American Kennel Club, or the AKC. Surprisingly, not all breeders were in favor of this step.

They feared that recognition would split the breed into a show variety and a herding type. So, when the idea was first proposed in 1985, it was declined.

But even more important, other individuals felt that the breed would experience a surge in popularity with the recognition. These people knew that as talented and loyal a dog the Aussie was, it was not the breed to be adopted by everyone.

The result? Eventually those who felt AKC recognition was vital formed another Australian Shepherd club. This one is called the **United States Australian Shepherd Association (USASA)**. This group modified the original

standard created by the ASCA and petitioned the AKC for full recognition. It was granted in 1993.

Not surprisingly, the Aussie is now a major contender in the herding group at AKC dog shows. He's also a strong competitor at the organization's herding trials as well.

But, the bottom line in this entire history: the Australian Shepherd is not a dog that belongs in every home.

Is he destined to be a part of your family? Decide for yourself as you read the next chapter on how you can tell if your home is an Aussie haven.