

# AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL KENNEL COUNCIL



Extended Breed Standard of  
**THE BERGAMASCO SHEPHERD**

Produced by  
The Australian National Kennel Council

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## **HISTORY**

Bergamascos are an ancient breed of herding dogs, at least 2000 years old. Bergamascos' progenitors originated in Asia and worked with nomadic shepherds as a guardian sheepdog in regions where bears and wolves prevailed. The dogs actually performed a two-fold purpose also acting as a shepherd in managing the flock. The Bergamasco was highly skilled in both these requirements. Eventually groups of these nomads moved west and settled here and there, and their dogs developed distinct characteristics over time. One group settled in the Italian Alps, these dogs became the Bergamasco. Other groups settled elsewhere, and their dogs became the Komondor, the Briard, the Puli and others, which are distant cousins of the Bergamasco, but now all with their own distinct traits.

Through the centuries this breed virtually remained the same; for this we must be grateful to the shepherds for whom these dogs were invaluable because of their exceptional efficiency in leading flocks. The breed satisfied the shepherds so much that they kept the strong will of the dogs unchanged. No modification was needed to improve their performances. This conservation of the breed throughout the centuries has become the best guarantee of its exceptional qualities.

When wool production dropped off in Italy after World War II, Bergamascos were less in demand as there were fewer shepherds. They became almost extinct. Fortunately, one woman, who happened to be a scientist with knowledge of genetics, was instrumental in saving the breed. Dr. Maria Andreoli developed what is considered the finest line of Bergamascos in the world. Other breeders in several European countries have worked carefully to expand these bloodlines and develop the strongest, happiest, healthiest and true to type Bergamascos possible.



Fig. 1: Typical male

## **BERGAMASCO SHEPHERD**

### **● BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

*This ancient breed of guard dogs of herds has spread all over the region of the Italian Alps; the total number of these dogs was especially great in the Bergamasca valleys, where the breeding of sheep was highly developed.*

### **● GENERAL APPEARANCE**

*The Bergamasco Shepherd is a dog of medium size of rustic appearance with an abundant coat covering all parts of the body, of powerful construction but very well proportioned. Its general shape is that of a medium proportioned dog, whose body fits into a square. He is balanced as much in relation to size (heterometry = normal proportions between size and different parts of the body) as with the profiles (alloidisme = concordance between the profiles of the head and the body).*

**Important proportions: The length of the body, measured from the foremost point of the shoulder (humeral-scapular joint) to the rear most point of the thigh (pelvic tuber of the ischium) is equal to the height at the withers (body fitting into a square). Permitted, but not desirable is a slight margin of tolerance which in no case must be more than one or two cms. The length of the head is 40% of the height at the withers. The depth of chest must be 50% of the height at the withers.**

Those studying the Standard will note the reference throughout to the comparison of measurements, percentages and angulations. Students of the breed may find this of some value in gaining an understanding of what is required. It should always be remembered, however, that assessment of an animal is an art and not a science. For example, the Standard calls for a dog, which is square, measured from the point of shoulder to the rear, compared with the height at the withers. The Standard goes on to say “Permitted, but not desirable is a slight margin of tolerance”. If two dogs are considered, one measuring within the requirements of the Standard, but too short in croup, and lacking correct slope of croup, poor rear angulation, tail set on too high, the second dog slightly longer than the height at the withers, but each part anatomically correct, the art of judging clearly indicates that the second is the superior example of the breed. It is the dog better equipped to carry out the purpose of the breed.

As a dog of mountain origins the Bergamasco is built for strength with well developed chest, deeply ribbed back, relatively short neck and strong well developed muscles.

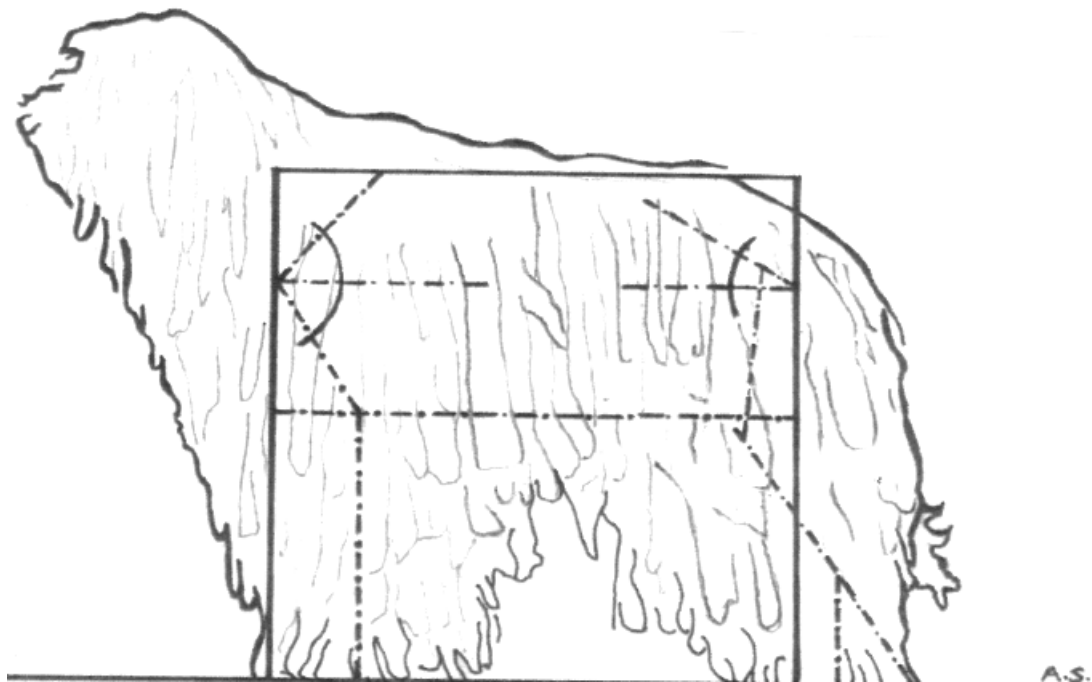


Fig.2: Showing height to length ratio

- **CHARACTERISTICS**

*(Not specified- see General Appearance and Temperament)*

- **TEMPERAMENT**

*The function of the Bergamasco Shepherd is to guide and guard the herd, the task for which he shows exemplary disposition thanks to his vigilance, his concentration and psychological balance. His learning faculty and determination combined with moderation and patience makes him an excellent guard and companion dog, suited to the most diverse uses. He establishes a close relationship with man.*

Strong, sound and brave, the Bergamasco is above all very intelligent and balanced. The intelligence of the dog has been refined by natural selection. Being alone with hundreds of sheep to look after and having to sort out difficult and unexpected problems caused the Bergamasco's intelligence to develop steadily. With this knowledge of thousands of year's experience, the Bergamasco is today adjusting himself to life in a new environment; in fact the family has now become his flock. Different from other breeds, which tend to choose only one master by ignoring others, the Bergamasco is the dog for all the family. In particular he loves and protects the children, which re-awakens his herding instinct.

His patience and caution, together with his vigilance, make him a perfect Nanny. He can be aggressive towards the stranger who invades his "territory", but when released from his duty of guardian the Bergamasco is a great friend to all.

Any indication of being aggressive or overly shy is regarded as a disqualifying fault.

- **HEAD AND SKULL**

*The length of muzzle is the same as that of the skull. In its parallel piped ensemble, the head seems large. The skin must not be thick, but close fitting to the underlying tissues without forming wrinkles.*

**Skull:** *The skull is broad and slightly convex between the ears; it is also wide and rounded in the region of the forehead. The upper longitudinal head planes of the skull and the muzzle are parallel. The length of the skull is the same as that of the muzzle. Its width must not be more than half the length of the head. The protuberances of the forehead are well developed both in longitudinal and transversal sense, the zygomatic process of the frontal bone are well defined. The median frontal furrow (or flute) is marked; the occipital protuberance is obvious and prominent.*

**Stop:** *The frontal nasal depression (stop) is well adjusted, but accentuated due to the marked apophyses (pronounced points) of the bones of the nose and forehead, the frontal protuberances and superciliary arches.*

**Muzzle:** *Tapers progressively towards its extremity and its lateral sides converge slightly, so that the muzzle itself is not pointed but truncated, with a foreface rather flat. Its length is the same as that of the skull. Its width, measured at half-length, reaches about 50% of its length. The height of the muzzle must not be less than half its length.*

**The upper profile of the muzzle, traced by the profile of the face, is straight. The lower profile is not determined by the lip, but by the jaw. Because of this conformation, the corner of the lips is not obvious; the mouth is well split so that the corner of the lips is at the level of an imaginary vertical from the outer angle of the eye. The lower profile of the jaw is almost straight.**

**Lips: Fine and of little importance, they separate under the nose making a well-opened arc, which forms a third of a circle; hence the teeth in the jaw are only just covered. The rims of the lips are well pigmented.**

The muzzle and skull are of equal length. Head planes are parallel, other than parallel planes is a serious fault. The coverage of hair gives the head a large appearance.

When viewed from above the head is rectangular in shape (described in the Standard as “parallel piped ensemble”), skin tight and free of wrinkles. Skull should be broad and slightly domed between the ears and rounded at the forehead. Width of skull should not be more than half the total length of the head. Eyebrows are clearly defined and prominent. Stop is pronounced.

The depth and width of the muzzle, measured at midpoint of the length of the muzzle, should each be about half the length of the muzzle. The muzzle is blunt, not pointed, tapering only slightly towards the nose. The lips are tight and of black pigment. The nose is large and black, with well-developed nostrils. In profile the nose is on the same line as the top of the muzzle and does not extend beyond the muzzle. The muzzle must be straight, showing no signs of being either roman nosed or concave. A partially depigmented nose is a serious fault, while total depigmentation is listed as a disqualifying fault.



*Fig .3: Typical young female head*

- **EYES**

**Large; the iris is of a more or less dark chestnut colour depending on the colour of the coat. They are set on an almost identical frontal plane. Their expression is soft, serene and attentive. The opening of the eyelid is slightly oval and the eyelid axis has an obliqueness of about 15 degrees on the horizontal. The eyelids fit tightly over the eye, with black-pigmented rims; eyelashes are particularly long so that they can lift the hair falling from the forehead over the eyes.**

The eyes are large, oval and set slightly obliquely, without any sign of a squint. Eye colour is brown, with the darkness of the colour varying with the coat of the dog. The eye rims are tight fitting and black. Third eye lid must be black. The expression is attentive and calm. Wall eyes are not permitted. The soft, serene and attentive expression of the eyes is particularly important.

- **EARS**

**Set high, semi drooping, i.e. the last two thirds of the lobe are drooping. When the dog is attentive, the ear lifts slightly at its base. Triangular shape. Length is between 11 and 13 cms, width 6.5 to 8 cms. It shows a wide base, which, towards the back, extends to where the head sets on the neck, whereas towards the front, it reaches the middle of the skull. The tip is slightly rounded. On the ears the hair is slightly wavy and soft; ending up forming fringes on the tip.**

The ear, set high, is triangular in shape and semi drooped (last two thirds), with a wide base, which, reaches from the back of the head to the middle of the skull. At attention the ear lifts slightly at the base. The hair on the ears is slightly wavy and soft, forming fringes on the tip, which is slightly rounded.

- **MOUTH**

**Upper and lower jaws well developed; the lower jaw (mandible) really strong and large. Teeth white, complete and well-developed dentition; incisors in regular alignment. Scissor bite.**

A perfect scissor bite with incisors in regular alignment is required. Well-developed jaws with a particularly strong lower jaw are essential. Teeth should be white. Any disfiguring of the mouth, teeth or jaws is regarded as a serious fault and an undershot mouth as a disqualifying fault.

- **NECK**

**Upper profile is slightly convex. The neck is a little bit shorter than the head; in effect, when extended, is not more than 80% of the length of the head. The perimeter of the neck, taken halfway of its length, must be at least double its length. The skin is never flabby, so always without dewlap. Hair must be dense.**

Neck should be slightly arched. Rather shorter than long, but must be wide and strong. When the dog is in action the neck is carried forward with its upper profile almost a continuation of the top line and only a slight angle at the withers.

The circumference of the neck, measured half way along its length, should be at least double its length. Should be totally free of dewlap. Hair forms a thick collar.

## ● **FOREQUARTERS**

***On the whole seen from the front and in profile the forequarters are straight. Height from ground to elbow is 50% of the height at the withers; they are well proportioned in relation to the size of the dog.***

***Shoulders: Well constructed and massive. The length of the shoulder blade is a little more than a quarter of the height at the withers and measure between 15 and 17 cms. Its obliqueness below the horizontal is of 45 to 55 degrees. Muscles must always be well developed.***

***Upper arm: Must be well muscled with strong bone construction. Its length is 30% of the height at the withers. Its inclination below the horizontal is between 60 and 70 degrees. The opening of the scapular-humerus angle varies between 105 and 125 degrees.***

***Elbows: Must be placed in parallel planes to the median plane of the body. The point of the elbow must be an imaginary vertical let down from the caudal angle of the shoulder blade. The opening of the radial-humerus angle varies from about 150 and 155 degrees. From the level of the elbow going downwards, the hair must be abundant, long and dense, with a tendency to look like flocks of hair.***

***Forearm: Vertical; its length is at least equal to that of the upper arm. Muscle and bone well developed.***

***Carpus: The carpal joint should be mobile and lean with the pisiform bone clearly protruding; it extends the vertical line of the forearm.***

***Metacarpus: The pastern must be lean and mobile. Seen from the front, must be placed in the same vertical plane as the forearm. Seen in profile, it is slightly oblique to the front.***

Whether viewed from the front or the side the legs should be straight. The shoulder blade must be wide and of sufficient length to ensure a good muscle support base, thus allowing for the suspension and rotation of the blade. The upper arm should be a little longer than the shoulder. Both must be well angulated from the horizontal. The elbow point must be set under the highest point of the withers. Writing in an article published in the KCC (Vic) Gazette of November 1988 Dr Harold R Spira illustrates the caudal "border" as the rear line of the shoulder blade. The FCI states that in this context caudal means rear or posterior. The main issue, is that it should be understood that the point of the elbow is set under the highest point of the withers. An imaginary line from the withers to the elbow will pass through the caudal border. Legs are well muscled with slight bend of pastern when viewed from the side.





Fig. 4: A young dog with coat just starting to develop

## ● **BODY**

**Topline:** *The withers are well defined from the straight topline. The lumbar region shows a certain convexity and the rump is somewhat sloping.*

**Withers:** *High and long. The neck harmoniously joined to the body.*

**Chest:** *Must be ample, brisket let down to the level of the elbows and well curved. Its perimeter (measured behind the elbows) is more by 25% than the height at the withers. Its transversal diameter must reach 30% of the height at the withers. Depth and height of the chest must be 50% of the height at the withers.*

**Back:** *Straight, well muscled and of good width, its length about 30% of the height at the withers. Lumbar region merging well with the topline and the rump. The length of the lumbar part is about 20% of the height at the withers; it is thus definitely shorter than the dorsal part. The width of the lumbar region is about the same as its length; muscles of the whole region are well developed.*

**Underline and Belly:** *From the sternum, the lower profile rises very slightly towards the belly, which is a little tucked up. The length of the flanks must correspond with that of the lumbar region, which is short. The hollowness in the flanks is minimal.*

***Croup: Wide, strong, well muscled and slanting, with an inclination of 30% below the horizontal. The transversal width between the hips must be 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the height at the withers.***

The withers are prominent and long, leading into a straight level back, very slightly arched loin then to a sloping croup. The chest is let down to the elbow and as indicated by the Standard the chest cavity is large, with very well sprung ribs. The loin is well muscled and broad. On the underline of the body, tuck-up is nearly absent.

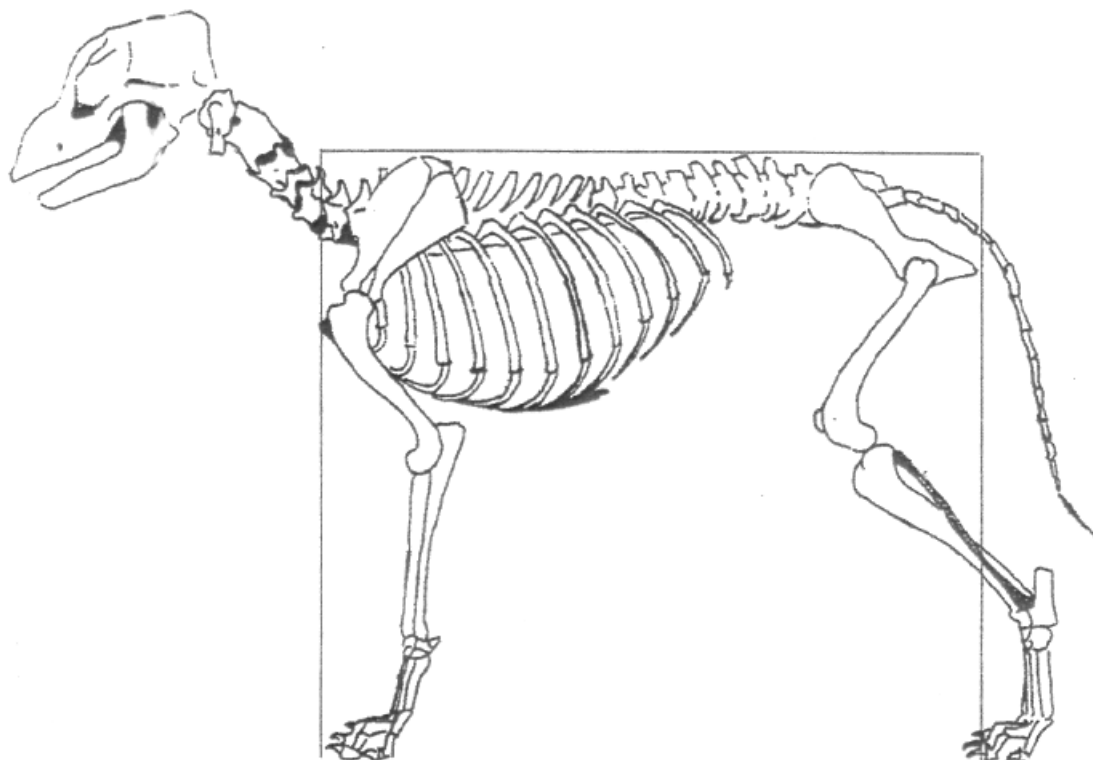


Fig.5: Skeleton showing height to length ratio

## ● HINDQUARTERS

***On the whole, the hindquarters relate well to the size of the dog. Limbs straight, as much in profile as seen from behind. The upper thigh is long, wide, well muscled with a rear profile slightly convex. Its length exceeds about 30% of the height at the withers, and its width 75% of its length. The aperture of the coxal-femoral (hip/thigh) joint angle varies between 100 and 105 degrees.***

***The second thigh has robust bone structure and lean muscle, the groove in the muscle is well marked. Length of leg is about 1/3 of the height at the withers. Inclination below the horizontal is about 55 degrees. The stifle joint is on a perfectly straight line with the limb and is not turned either in nor out. The tibial-femoral (stifle) angle is open and measures about 130-135 degrees.***

***The lateral sides of the hock must be really wide. The distance from the point of the hock to the ground must not be less than 25% of the height at the withers. Aperture of the angle of the tarsal-tibial articulation (hock joint) varies between 140 and 145 degrees.***

***The rear pastern is about 15% of the height at the withers if gauged independently; if measured from the point of the heel bone, its length is the same as that of the hock. Its direction must be vertical. Dewclaws must be removed.***

The first thigh is long, wide and well muscled. The second thigh is as long as the first, with strong bone and lean muscles, these join at an angulation, which creates a good turn of stifle.

Viewed from behind, the rear pastern 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 from the point of buttock. The angle of the hock joint should be clearly defined.



Fig.6: Typical of the breed

#### ● FEET

***The front feet should be oval shaped (hare foot) with well closed and arched toes. Strong nails, curved and well pigmented. Tough pads of a dark colour. The hind feet are as the front feet with all the same characteristics.***

The Bergamasco is a hare footed breed, oval shaped with well arched toes. Well pigmented strong nails are required, with dark pads.

- **TAIL**

**Set on third part of the rump, thick and strong at its root, tapering towards its extremity. Covered with goat-like hair slightly wavy. Its length is 60 to 65% of the height at the withers and reaches the hock easily when the dog is standing normally; though it is preferable it should be shorter. At rest the tail is carried "sabre" fashion i.e. drooping in its first third part, then slightly curved in its last third part. In action the dog wags his tail like a flag.**

The tail is low set, thick and strong at the root, tapering towards the end. The tail should reach to the hock or slightly shorter. Carried sabre fashion at rest (that is dropping in the first part, then slightly curved). The dog moves the tail in a flag like action when on the move. A curled up tail is a serious fault and carried rolled over the back is classified as a disqualification. Both no tail and stumpy tail are regarded as a disqualification.



*Fig. 7: Correct tail set and carriage*



*Fig. 8: Incorrect tail set and carriage*

- **SKIN**

***Tight to the body, must be fine all over, but especially on the ears and forequarters. Neck without dewlap and head without wrinkles. Colour of the mucous membranes and third eyelids must be black.***

No dewlap is allowed and the head must be free of wrinkles. Total lack of pigmentation of the rims of the lips and eyes is regarded as a disqualifying fault. The skin must be tight and fine all over with particular attention to the ears and forequarters.

- **GAIT/MOVEMENT**

***Step free and long; the trot, rather extended and well maintained, is the preferred gait. Because of its conformation, the dog can easily go into an ordinary gallop, which he is able to maintain for a relatively long time.***

Because a herding dog is required to be in constant motion while the flock is being driven, correct, efficient movement is essential. The natural preferred gait of the Bergamasco is a free extended elastic trot with both front and rear feet remaining close to the ground. Pasterns are supple and flex freely. When moving, the head and neck are carried forward with its upper profile almost a continuation of the top line with only a slight angle at the withers.

- **COAT**

***Very abundant, very long and different depending on the regions. The texture is harsh, (goat hair) particularly on the front of the body. From halfway of the chest towards the rear, and on all limbs, the coat tends to form strands or loose mats, or is already in strands or loose mats, depending on the subjects age; these strands or loose mats are not cords and must start from the topline of the back and fall on the sides of the body. On the head the hair is less harsh and covers the eyes. On the limbs, the coat must be evenly distributed everywhere in the shape of soft flocks falling towards the ground; forming a kind of vertical column of hair on the front and strands on the hindquarters, without fringes. The undercoat is so short and dense it is not easy to see the skin. Must be greasy to the touch.***

The major characteristic of the breed is the unique coat. The belief that the Bergamasco has ancestors in common with other breeds in the group is confirmed by its coat structure, which has similarities, although each breed has its own characteristics.

Common to these breeds is the presence of three types of hair:

- a) The undercoat – fine, dense and oily, adhering to the skin and forming a waterproof protective layer.
- b) The goat hair- strong and rough as in a goat, which grows together in tufts.
- c) The woolly top coat- fine in texture and which grows together in tufts.

The difference between the various breeds with this type of hair is the distribution of the woolly and goat hair, whilst the undercoat is common in all of them. The East European breeds, Komondor and Puli, have coats consisting mainly of woolly hair with relatively little goat hair.

The opposite is true of the West European breed, Briard, having a coat consisting mainly of goat hair. The Bergamasco geographically between them has a coat in which both types of hair are present in almost equal quantities, although differently distributed.

Due to the presence of these three types of hair, the structure of the Bergamasco's coat is extremely complex and it is important to be able to distinguish its characteristics, which are unique.

The various types of hair are distributed over the body as follows:

- a) In the region of the withers down to roughly half the depth of the thorax only goat hair is present forming a smooth saddle. In this area, the coat resembles that of the Briard.
- b) In the rear section of the trunk and on the limbs, together with the goat hair, which is still present there is a vast amount of woolly hair from which the particular masses of hair, known as "mats" or "flocks" originate.

The Bergamasco "mat" is large at its base, flat, irregular and sometimes opening fanwise. This is due to the abundant presence of goat hair mixed with the woolly hair. Because the goat hair is stiffer in texture, it forms wide, thick meshes, so that the woolly hair weaves through it instead of twisting around it. The coat assumes a woven texture. The mats start from the spine and go down the flanks growing every year to reach the ground.

Therefore the coat of the Bergamasco is not homogeneous, but has a parting at the withers where the smooth saddle, devoid of mats, is located. This is not the case with the Komondor or Puli where the distribution of the woolly hair is homogeneous, forming corded strands all over the body.

This thick coat protects the dog from cold, heat, rain and bites from snakes and insects.

This thick curtain of coat that covers the eyes has a functional purpose; it serves as a visor, so as not to be dazzled by the sun reflecting off snow in the mountains. It also allows the dog to look in any direction, even towards the sun.

The development of the coat is as follows:

- a) Up until about twelve months of age, the dog has puppy coat soft and short.
- b) During the second year, formation of hair of a different texture begins, together with the moulting of the puppy hair. The first visible sign of this is that the coat seems to rise, as if it were blown up due to the growth of the fine, abundant undercoat, that blends with the puppy hair, which is gradually moulting. Commencing at the rear of the body, on the croup and back legs, the woolly hair makes its appearance whilst, first on the tail and later in the withers area, the goat hair starts to form. From the withers it successively extends over the whole saddle and in slightly smaller proportions, over the whole body, mixing with the woolly hair.

The soft puppy hair while moulting mixes with the undercoat and the woolly and goat hair in formation. This creates shapeless clumps. The dog is not particularly attractive at this time. All the budding mats stick out in all directions.

- c) At about three years of age the coat should be fully formed and even if the mats are relatively short, they should be capable of constituting a dignified “skirt”. From here on the length of the mats will increase in size, each year.



Fig. 9: Showing “mats” in full coat



Fig. 10: Showing “mats” distributed on the body

### ● COLOUR

**Solid grey or with patches of all possible shades from a delicate grey to a brighter shade of grey on to black; Isabella and light fawn shades are permitted. An all black coat is allowed providing the black is really opaque (zain). An all white coat is not allowed. White patches are tolerated as long as their surface is not more than a fifth of the total surface of the coat.**

The colour of the coat can be anything from grey with black markings through to black. The Standard also permits Isabella and light fawn shades.

Under the influence of sun, water and atmospheric factors in general as well as aging of the hair, the loose hairs that form part of the mat mass gradually change colour; the grey hairs turn yellowish whilst the black ones take on a tawny hue. This is what causes the grey or black hairs to appear as beige and reddish colours visible in adults. An examination of the hair of the mats at its roots, close to the skin, will show it is either grey, black or fawn. This is the way to ascertain the coat colour in adults. With younger stock it is easy to discern.

An all white coat is not allowed, any amount of white over one fifth of the total surface is considered a disqualifying fault.



*Fig.11: Puppies demonstrating the colours of grey with black markings and total black*

#### ● **SIZE AND WEIGHT**

***The ideal height at the withers for males is 60 cms with a tolerance of 2 cms, either above or below. For females 56 cms with a tolerance of 2 cms more or less.***

<b>Weight:</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>32-38 kgs</b>
	<b>Females</b>	<b>26-32 kgs</b>

Any size over or under those indicated is regarded as a serious fault.



## ● FAULTS

*Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in the exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog. The same conditions apply with too small a head and those who amble permanently.*

### **Serious Faults:**

*Facial-cranial head planes convergent or divergent.  
Accentuated and disfiguring prognathism (mouth).  
Bilateral strabismus (squint).  
Nose partially depigmented.  
Size over or under the margins indicated by the Standard.  
Curled up tail.*

### **Disqualifying Faults:**

*Aggressive or overly shy.  
Total depigmentation of the nose.  
Muzzle (foreface) definitely convex (roman nose) or concave.  
Total bilateral depigmentation of the eyelids.  
Wall eyed (even one eye).  
Jaws: Upper prognathism (undershot mouth).  
Taillessness (anury) or stump tail (brachyury); tail carried rolled over the back.  
Skin: Total depigmentation of the rims of the lips and of the eyes.  
Coat colour: White, more than 1/5 of the total surface.  
Any dog clearly showing physical or behavioural abnormalities shall be disqualified.*

***N.B. Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.***

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Standard translated by: Mrs Peggy Davis and Mrs Ruth Binder-Gresly  
Dr Maria Andreoli. Italy – The Bergamasco Shepherd