

You can Count

on me



PAUL MANNING

MARK ROYCHOFF

**Confident and
dependable,
the German
Shepherd Dog
keeps faithful watch
over his family.**



Early one morning last winter, Barbara Williams and her 8-year-old German Shepherd Dog Nero were out walking the six acres of rural countryside they call home in Harrisburg, Ore., when she noticed a strange man walking up the mountain road and across the pasture.

BY TERRY
WINKELMANN



MARK RAYCROFT

"He was wearing a long, black raincoat and black cap, and looked totally out of place up here in our small, hilltop community," recalls Williams, chair of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America's Health and Genetics Committee and a breeder of GSDs for more than 50 years. "He couldn't see Nero because there is a tall hedge between our house and the road. He could only see a silver-haired, old woman walking alone."

The man started to climb the fence, headed toward Williams. "Nero, still behind the hedge, hadn't seen him yet, but he immediately sensed my fear and ran out in front of me, the full

length of his lead. The next moment, they saw each other, and Nero let go one of his 'lion warnings.' It's not a growl or a bark. I can't describe it, but it will stand the hair up on the back of your neck," she says. "That man got one look at Nero, all 92 pounds of him, and almost tore his coat off getting back across the fence!"

Moments later, the police arrived ahead of their own tracking dog. That's when Williams told them, "My dog can track." In no time, the West German-trained Shepherd led police up the wooded hillside to a set of fresh tracks.

"Nero was only doing what comes naturally to this incomparable breed," Williams says. "I

have always counted on my German Shepherds to guard, and defend, and protect me."

So famous are they for their law enforcement and military work that the dogs are sometimes simply referred to as "police dogs." But GSDs were designed, just a century ago, to be the consummate worker. Today they excel not just in protection, but at guarding and herding sheep, as well as in search and rescue, service, tracking, detection work, and animal-assisted therapy.

Carmen Battaglia, Ph.D., a human behavioral scientist and researcher in Roswell, Ga., has been breeding and studying GSDs for more

BREEDPROFILE

German Shepherd Dog

Country of origin: Germany.

Original use: Herding sheep.

Group: Herding Group (AKC);
Herding Dog (UKC).

Life span: 12 to 14 years.

Color: Variable, but strong colors preferred by AKC standard; blue and liver are serious faults. White is accepted by the UKC, but disqualified in the AKC show ring.

Coat: Harsh, straight, medium-length outercoat with soft, dense undercoat that sheds seasonally.

Grooming: Biweekly brushing to control continual year-round shedding. Daily brushing during coat-shedding seasons.

Height/weight: Males, 24 to 26 inches; females, 22 to 24 inches; 60 to 85 pounds.

Personality: Deeply affectionate and loyal, but reserved with strangers. Highly intelligent, confident, and lively.

Trainability: High.

Activity level: High.

Known health problems: Hip and elbow dysplasia, bloat, skin conditions, and gastrointestinal problems, including gastritis and vomiting, among others.

Good with children? Yes.

Good with other pets? Yes; tolerant of most other pets.

National breed club: German Shepherd Dog Club of America, Sharon Albright, corresponding secretary; P.O. Box 429, Applegate, CA 95703; (530) 878-2826; sharlen@foothill.net; www.gsdca.org

Rescue: American German Shepherd Rescue Association, Linda Kury, president; (630) 529-7396; www.agsra.com

More info: www.dogchannel.com/germanshepherd

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FURRY KIND



than 30 years. "GSDs are probably the most versatile of all breeds," he says.

When he lets his latest pair, 3-year-old Dash and 6-year-old Cassie, outside in the mornings, the first thing they do is walk the perimeter of the property, checking to see if anyone or anything visited during the night. "They patrol," he says. "Then when we go on our daily walks in the neighborhood, they herd. They go out to the end of their 20-foot retractable leads, come back, circle around us, and go out again — herding us as we walk. When we come to the community pond, Cassie circles out and gathers the ducks."

Shepherds are also a very healthy breed, Battaglia says, with only five or six known inherited diseases. Hip dysplasia, once notorious among GSDs, ranks much lower today at No. 41 of 148 breeds tracked by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals.

"GSDs are wonderful dogs, but they are not your everyday, you-do-your-thing-and-I'll-do-mine kind of dog," Williams says. "[Max] Von Stephanitz [the German cavalry officer who first developed the breed] set out to create the finest canine working breed in the world, and he succeeded with the GSD. The Shepherd is keenly aware of his surroundings and will protect his master, his home, belongings, and family with his life."

That's because the GSD's capacity for love and companionship runs deep. "A Shepherd follows directions and willingly gives you control if you earn it," Williams notes. To win your Shepherd's devotion, you must provide firm yet gentle leadership, in addition to lavishing him with your love, respect, and companionship.

"A few minutes at the end of the day won't satisfy GSDs' emotional needs," Battaglia warns. "You have to put time, effort, and energy into them."

Fortunately, the combination of a big brain



What about white?

White-coated German Shepherd Dogs have been a part of the breed since its earliest days, but different registries apply different policies, leading to a bit of controversy. The American Kennel Club breed standard lists white as a disqualification in the show ring, but white German Shepherd Dogs are fully registrable and may participate in all other AKC-sanctioned activities and performance events. The United Kennel Club, on the other hand, has given the White Shepherd separate breed status.

and a loving heart makes the GSD one of the easiest dogs to live with and train. Introduce house rules to puppies immediately, and follow up with obedience classes.

"A Shepherd with a good temperament is laid-back, but he has his job to do, whether that's protecting you, or the house and the baby, or the cat," says Lew Bunch, president of the GSDCA and a Kansas City, Mo., resident.

An older, well-trained, well-exercised GSD may give the appearance of an elder statesman — calm, dignified, confident — but up until about age 3, he can be a very large handful. Mature Shepherds, however, enjoy the antics of respectful children and tolerate household pets quite well. "Dash sprawls out on the floor, and the cats step over him," Battaglia says. "He pays little to no attention to them."

In 2006 the GSD was ranked the third most popular breed in American Kennel Club registrations — up from fourth place in 2005. "The GSD has always been popular and justifiably so," says Bunch, "because they are so fun and so versatile." Bunch has six of his own. "They all sleep in the bedroom with us at night and in the morning we go for a run. They make me grin every day," he says. "They're my best friends." ■

Terry Winkelmann is a DOG FANCY contributing editor who lives in St. Louis.

ASKTHEBREEDER

- Do you breed for police work or for companions?
- Do both the puppy's parents have their hip and elbow certificates from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals?
- What is the incidence of autoimmune disorders in this puppy's family?
- Do your dogs compete in dog shows or other competitions and if so, what titles do they have?

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