

The Bernese Mountain Dog

By R. Caldwell

Two thousand years ago Roman legions streamed over the Alps and poured into Switzerland. With them as watchdogs, burden carriers and perhaps companions, came large black and tan dogs with white markings. This breed, now called the Bernese Mountain Dog, is one of the oldest pure breeds known. Their descendants are to be met in Switzerland to this day, where they were formerly used chiefly as draught animals pulling milk carts, and carts owned by weavers piled high with bundles of textiles. Nowadays they are kept on farms, where they are valuable for herding cattle. And they have become cherished household pets, for they are excellent watchdogs and may safely be left with children.

Yet the Bernese has been somewhat crowded out by the Swiss national breed—the St. Bernard. Popular until about 1850, the Bernese gradually sank out of sight. In 1891 a local dog fancier vainly tried to find a good example of the breed. Greatly shocked, he set about remedying this condition, and with such good results that in 1907 a specialty club was formed. However, the Bernese are not prolific breeders and seem little known outside of their own country, although a few have gone to Holland, England and Australia.

According to the records of the Department of Agriculture, the only importer of Bernese dogs into the United States is Glen Shadow of Ruston, La. It is difficult to understand why this should be so, for the Bernese is certainly an exceptionally handsome animal, and fully as deserving of popular favor as any other European breed. The first Bernese dogs came over in 1936, when Mr. Shadow brought in Felix and Fridy, a bitch with a very fine show record abroad. Exhibited in the International Dog Show held at Basle, Switzerland, in 1935, Fridy took best of breed and best of her sex. In addition, she was awarded an "International Beauty Certificate", setting her apart as one of the best dogs in Europe.

Mr. Shadow says of these dogs: "They are very kind by nature, but are very courageous and ready to stand their ground if imposed upon. They are also ready to protect their master. Some would become vicious if abused or handled roughly frequently. They are very undemanding and do not take exception to minor unkindness's, or to average dogs' petty growls. But when they do attempt to defend themselves, or their master, they are certainly well qualified in every respect to hold their own."

No doubt Mr. Shadow speaks with feeling, as he owes his life to two of his Bernese dogs - Felix and Frances. When he was attacked and badly mauled by an infuriated buck, these dogs came to the rescue. Each grabbed one of the deer's legs and took him off their master; the deer then broke away from them and swam a lake with Felix and Frances hot at his heels. It was a 350-pound buck with ten points, and the dogs rendered the best aid possible, but it was a very close call for their owner. However, the Bernese is not a hunting dog, for he has always been considered as a farm and general utility breed. He might be trained, Mr. Shadow thinks, but he would not, of course, have the speed and tracking ability of a hound, since he has been bred rather for ruggedness and stamina. The bitch Frances, above mentioned is a daughter of Fridy, the international prize winner, whom she closely resembles.

The Bernese is in no sense a made breed, or a composite one, since he has never so far as is known been crossed with any other. He is smaller than the St. Bernard, and never shows the weakness of back and slackness of loin occasionally found in larger breeds. His appearance is very pleasing, partly due to the peculiar markings which are considered most important. The body color is a deep glossy black with russet brown marks on all legs, and a tan or bright russet spot over each eye. The chest is white, the marking rays out like a cross, while the brown marks on the forelegs must



Friday, the first Bernese Mountain puppy whelped in the United States. Owned and bred by Glen L. Shadow, Ruston, La.

invariably come between the black and white colorings. The feet should be white, as well as the tip of the tail, which may be carried either low or gayly, but never curled tightly over the back. Its underside is frequently yellow. There is a white blaze on the face, and the eyes are brown with an intelligent and fiery expression. Light and staring eyes are taboo. Tan spots above the eyes add greatly to the expressiveness of the Bernese's open and pleasing countenance.

Great stress is laid on clearness of tone in the markings; that is, the white must be pure and not flecked or ticked with color, the black must be uniform and glossy, and the brown a rich deep russet, or mellow golden tan. While the markings must be clearly defined, it is not desired to breed all dogs with markings of uniform size and shape, as it is felt this would detract from individuality. Although white feet are considered desirable, white legs are not, and will in fact disqualify a dog. There used to be solid yellow animals, but these were bred out and have not been seen since before the first World War. The coat is wavy with a natural silken sheen, but it must never be curly or crinkly. It is moderately long.

The skull is flat, with a well-defined stop and strong muzzle. While the head slightly resembles a Newfoundland's, it must under no circumstances be heavy or coarse; neither, on the other hand, may the muzzle be narrow and fine. The ears are short, V-shaped but not too pointed, and are set on high. When the dog is alert the ears are brought forward a little, otherwise they hang close to the head.

A compact, well-ribbed-up and relatively short body is characteristic. It should never be long, slender and setter-like. The chest is broad, insuring good wind and pulling ability, the brisket is deep. Thighs are well developed, round and compact, while the forelegs must be perfectly straight, and the feet round and neat. Hare's feet and cow hock are serious

faults, and it must be admitted are seldom encountered.

A full-grown dog is about 23 to 27 1/2 inches at the shoulder; bitches, of course, run smaller, being about 21 to 22 inches. Size is not of primary importance, however.

The Bernese is recognized by the American Kennel Club, and it is hoped may attain widespread popularity in postwar days when importation again becomes possible. Certainly, he is a delight to the eye, and of great value on farms and large country estates.

A scale of points is given herewith:

General appearance _____	15
Size and height _____	5
Head _____	15
Body _____	15
Tail _____	10
Coat _____	10
Legs and feet _____	15
Color and markings _____	15

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- Please note -

Certain advertisements and other article text segments have been removed as they do not pertain to this article. Additionally, some minor adjustments in the original layout and formatting have been made.

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