

IS A BERNER RIGHT FOR YOU?

Chances are you are visiting our website in the hopes of finding a puppy.

WELCOME!! You are starting your puppy search in the right place.

Now, please take the time to consider whether a Bernese Mountain dog is really the right dog for you. Many consider this step unnecessary, but the grim reality is, the reason so many purebred dogs wind up in shelters or with rescue groups is because a buyer made an uninformed, impulsive decision to purchase a cute puppy, only to discover six months later that they got more than they bargained for. We don't want to see our dogs either in our rescue program, or relinquished to a local shelter.

Therefore, we ask you to take the time to research the breed now, and decide if you are really prepared for the commitment that goes along with ownership.

A LITTLE BERNER BACKGROUND

Bernese Mountain dogs were developed from dogs found in the countryside around Bern, Switzerland. Bernese were originally the farmers dog – they were **guard dogs**, defending the farm; **droving dogs**, driving cattle to and from their mountain pastures, and **draft dogs**, pulling carts laden with milk to the dairy. The breed was saved from near extinction by Professor Albert Heim around the turn of the century.

Bernese first came to America in the 1920's and were recognized by the AKC in 1937.

The breed grow slowly, but steadily in popularity over the years. Recently, berners have become hugely popular. They are up from the 90th to the 45th most popular breed, according to AKC statistics. Understandably, this has created tremendous pressures on the breed, as irresponsible breeders pump out physically and temperamentally compromised pups that get sold to the uneducated buyer.

SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER:

If you are thinking of making a berner part of your family, please consider the following as part of your research:

1. The most often given reason most potential puppy buyers are interested in in berners is **"they are great with kids."** This is true, but this statement could be made for roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of purebred dogs and mixes out there. The primary reason for a successful dog/child relationship is the commitment of the parents to supervise ALL interactions between puppy and child. Many berner pups can be quite stubborn about giving up or inhibiting play biting. Children can unwittingly encourage this behaviour, resulting in the child being bitten and then becoming fearful of the dog. Conversely, puppies, even chunky berner pups, are pretty fragile and can be easily injured by overly enthusiastic children. Unsupervised play is like an accident waiting to happen.

Are you as parents committed to devoting the time and energy necessary to raising another "baby," and to controlling the interaction with other children?

2. Berners want to be where you are. They can usually be found ON your feet. They are often referred to as a "Velcro" dog. This is not a dog for a casual dog owner. If you want a dog around only when it is convenient for you, but out of your way when you don't have time, this is NOT the breed for you. No dog thrives as a "backyard" dog, but berners especially suffer from this sort of isolation. A berners neediness is overwhelming for some people.

Do you welcome and enjoy the constant attention and neediness of your dog, or do you find this devotion to be suffocating?

3. Berners have their share of health problems. These are itemized in BMDCA InfoSeries #4. Unfortunately, these medical conditions can require a significant investment to treat. Even relatively healthy dogs cost several hundreds of dollars per year in maintenance costs. Additionally, there is also the emotional investment that goes along with this.

Do you have the financial wherewithal AND the willingness to provide medical care where needed. Are you and your family emotionally prepared to live with and treat a chronically sick dog, and to say goodbye to your dog at what seems to be an absurdly early age, such as 4 – 6 years.

4. While most berners are sweet natured, there is a strong tendency in the breed to be aloof, reserved and even shy around strangers. Berners need intense socialization, starting with puppy kindergarten, to help them grow up to be well adapted adults. Pups need to be introduced to new people and situations on a regular and ongoing basis. Praised-based, positive reinforcement obedience classes are also a near-must to ensure you wind up with a well-mannered dog. As owners of a large breed dog, you have a special obligation to be a "good ambassador" in a society which has preconceptions about the "big black dog."

Are you prepared for the commitment needed to help your pup develop into a good canine citizen?

5. How active are you? If you want your berner to share in a very active outdoor lifestyle such as jogging or bicycling, especially in our hot, humid, southern climate, a berner is not the dog for you. By the same token, these dogs are not the "couch potatoes" they are sometimes depicted to be. They can be quite energetic and require brisk exercise and an area to run freely off leash. They are also the happiest when they have a "job." Unlike the gun dogs, berners are seldom satisfied with repetitive tennis ball retrieval. Many enjoy carting, competitive obedience, agility, herding and tracking. See BMDCA InfoSeries for more information about these activities you can enjoy with your berner. The important thing is, berners want to share this moderately energetic activity with their owners.

Does a bernese really fit your lifestyle?

6. Berners shed. There are lots of ways to say this. Berners only shed once a year – for 365 days. Berners shed twice a year, for six months each time. Berners blow their coats twice a year and shed in between times. If having a lot of animal fur in your house bothers you, a berner is not for you. If there is a household member who is allergic to animals, a berner is not for you. Some berners also drool, some profusely.

How much do you care about maintaining a meticulously clean house?

7. Berners range in size from a small 23" 65 lb female, to a large 28" 120+ lb male, and everything in between. They need room to romp and have exercise needs. Is your yard fully fenced? Do you have room to accommodate a large dog that needs to live indoors with his people but needs to have room to run outside.

Is your home prepared for a big, active dog?

8. If this is to be a family dog, is everyone willing to accept responsibility for meeting the dog's needs? If the primary caregiver becomes unable to take care of the dog, will others pick up the slack? If this is to be a child's dog, do you understand that the reality is YOU will be the primary caregiver? We have seen too many berners wind up in Rescue who started out as "the husband's dog." When the majority of the dog care ended up the responsibility of the unwilling wife, our club became the resource left with the task of trying to place an untrained, unsocialized and unwanted dog. We do not believe a dog is a disposable commodity. We'd prefer you to get a goldfish, rather than a Berner, if you think you will get rid of the dog "if it doesn't work out."

Is your ENTIRE family eager and committed to welcome a dog into your home and your life?

Take the **COMPATABILITY PROFILER** to see how well your lifestyle matches a Berner.

Other great resources for you:

Puppy Buyer's Guide (http://www.bmdcsew.org/pbg2_index.htm)

Michelle Weldon's *Your Purebred Puppy: A Buyer's Guide*. www.yourpurebredpuppy.com

Berner Home Page: www.berner.org

Books:

Guenter, Bernd. *The Bernese Mountain Dog: A Dog of Destiny*

Russ, Diane, and Rogers, Shirle, *The Beautiful Bernese Mountain Dog*

Smith, Sharon, *The New Bernese Mountain Dog*