



Armenian Gampr Breed Standard

Introduction

Armenian Gampr [gʌmpər] is an endemic dog of the Armenian Highland.

Armenian Highland is one of the cradles of civilization. Since the times immemorial, the man domesticated and used various animals, dogs and cats, goats and sheep, horses and donkeys, hunt lynx and other animals. The Gampr, however, was different from all these animals, as it accompanied the man as he bred stock and hunted, cultivated the land, built settlements, created objects of art and enjoyed rare moments of leisure.

The Armenian Highland is made up by mountain ranges, deep gorges, mountain rivers, steppes and alpine meadows. This relatively small area has almost all climate zones of the world. The landscape, the flora and the fauna change with the altitude above sea level. Despite the demanding climate, almost the whole area of the Armenian Highland is populated. The Gampr, with its typical fidelity and adaptability, follows its perseverant masters everywhere.

The Armenian Gampr is a unique breed created through the centuries of patient and targeted breeding and natural selection, and in relative isolation from the rest of the world.

The Gampr is a working breed, mostly used as a herding dog, guard dog, hunting dog, war dog, rescue dog, a hardworking companion and an equal member of the family. The confidence and affection of the man towards his Gampr has always been complete and unconditional.

Armenian myths and folklore praise the unrivaled courage, strength, beauty, wisdom, candor, loyalty and noble character of the Gampr. Such high esteem secured the Gampr a place in the pantheon of Armenian deities: Aralez, the canine deity, tended to the wounds of warriors in the battlefield by licking them and brought them back to life – a truly canine behaviour... The Gampr enjoys a well-deserved and important role in the history and culture of Armenians.

This standard offers general information about the history and features of the Armenian Gampr and helps those who breed and show these dogs and work and live next to them. The description of the character and appearance offers a general guideline for breeding and qualification.

History

Petroglyphs found in abundance in the territory of today's Republic of Armenia, mostly in Geghama and Syunik mountains, are a rich source of information on the emergence and the development of the Armenian Gampr. Dating back to the 7th to the 3rd millennia B.C., these petroglyphs contain an amazing number of different dog images; they are also remarkable for the diversity of roles these dogs perform. In more recent petroglyphs of the 1st millennia B.C., Gampr-like dogs increasingly prevail.

Archaeological excavation of tombs discovered in the basin of Lake Sevan (1st millennia B.C.) revealed numerous dog skulls; their characteristics are essentially identical to the modern Gampr's head.

Numerous pottery pieces discovered in Lori Fortress are decorated with images of Gampr-like dogs.

Endemic wild sheep varieties found in the Armenian Highland indicate that sheep breeding started here; hence the need for large herding dogs that would herd the flock and at the same time protect it from predators.

Numerous research and evidence suggest that this breed as we know it emerged in the first millennia B.C., i.e. approximately three thousand years ago.

Armenian chronicles of the Middle Ages contain numerous references to the multiple uses of the Gampr, its breeding and value. Since the 19th century, there have been written references by European travelers describing the dogs of Armenia.

First attempts at breeding the Gampr according to modern methods started in the beginning of the 20th century, in the Soviet Union. Breeders joined all varieties of the breed in one group, determined a breeding policy and called the resulting breed a *Caucasian Ovcharka* (sheepdog). A great number of Gampr were exported from Armenia in that period. The dog's robust health, stamina, power and guarding abilities were in high demand in many parts of the then Soviet Union, a huge country with vast territories. There were failed attempts to create new, Soviet breeds by crossing the Gampr with Saint Bernard, German Shepherd, the Newfoundland, the Great Dane and other breeds. Similar attempts are currently made in some other countries.

In today's Armenia, the Gampr is widely used in agriculture, mostly for herding livestock. The Gampr is used in other areas of human activity, including guarding property both in rural and urban areas. The Gampr breeders include kennel clubs, individual enthusiasts and shepherds.

Character/Behaviour

The character is the most defining feature of the Gampr.

- **Simple instincts**

Unlike modern dog breeds, the Gampr has rather simple instincts, more typical of

- a wild animal. Such simplicity reflects the quintessential and polished features typical of a superdog.
- **Sound nervous system**
Nothing can surprise the Gampr, it has seen it all and is ready for anything. Even the most ferocious Gampr will try, before eliminating an intruder, to determine whether the danger is imminent. There is no Gampr in rage; wisdom accumulated in the course of the centuries tells that the rage makes one vulnerable and the nature disposes of the excitable ones. The Gampr will readily accept any change.
 - **Independent decision making**
In the course of their difficult lives, Gamprs often came across situations requiring quick and right decisions. As the master was not always there, the Gampr learnt the lesson of independent decision making well.

While endowed with sophisticated protective (guarding) instincts, the Gampr is not an aggressive dog. Dogs from Armenia have always been different for their calm temperament and independent decision making ability.

The Gampr is a proud and independent dog. It is rather reserved in displaying signs of affection and may come across as an extremely independent dog compared to other breeds. It is smart and finds it difficult to obey unreasonable commands.

In wild nature, and especially in the mountains, the Gampr becomes a completely different dog. The movements and gait become fluid, stealthy and silent. The dog follows the master from a distance, going in wide circles and guarding the perimeter, while always keeping an eye on everyone it feels it should protect. In emergencies, the strong instincts and powerful natural imprints take over learned behaviour patterns. The Gampr is a cautious character, it always takes the safest route and tries to avoid unnecessary risks.

The Gampr should be treated with respect. If abused, it will withdraw into itself and assume an aloof demeanour, and it would be extremely difficult to earn the Gampr's confidence back.

The Gampr usually protects and takes care of the weak. Friendly towards all animals it is tasked to guard, the Gampr is quiet around children, yet accepting only the strong and the determined as its master. It has a strong feeling of camaraderie towards other domestic animals and is a natural herding dog. This accommodating and hard working dog is happy only when there is a duty to perform and to keep it busy at all times.

Not a very loud dog to start with, the Gampr would never bark without an obvious reason. It is impossible to mistake the Gampr's growl for any other dog's voice; it is more like a roar, and quite a terrifying one.

Despite its impressive size and striking demeanor, the Gampr is mostly inconspicuous, does not take up much space and reminds one of its presence only when there is a business at hand.

The Gampr leaves an impression of a wise and intelligent dog. Spending time with the Gampr is a very relaxing experience.

General Appearance

Unlike other modern breeds, Gampr's appearance – the size, proportions, substance and color, may not be uniform and varies from region to region. The purpose of this standard is to provide a general description of the Gampr's appearance, with an emphasis on the dog's working abilities, behaviour and character.

Gamprs are large and rugged dogs, with a well developed and muscular body covered with a double coat, and a powerful head. The body shape is rectangular, slightly longer than tall. Despite the large size, the Gampr does not come across as a bulky or a heavy dog. The movements are easy, balanced and fluid. One grasps the true size of the dog only when looking at it in a quiet standing or sitting position, from a close distance or when comparing it to some other animal or object. In mountainous regions, the prevailing type is a large dog with a long coat, while in the lowlands dogs of a lighter built and with a shorter coat are more common.

At first sight, Gampr's appearance may not be particularly appealing; simple coarse lines, rough coat, lazy and ungraceful movements when the dog is resting: expediency is the defining feature of all natural breeds. The rough coat protects the dog from the cold, fangs of predators and other perils. Variations in color help blend into different backgrounds. The total absence of unnecessary movements serves to optimize the food intake and keep the huge body in shape at all times.

Head - Large, full and impressive, without signs of dryness, with extremely powerful jaws; the cheekbones should not be very prominent. The apex is broad and dome-like, with a moderate stop, taking about 60% of the head's length. The flews are thick, tight and dry. The top of the skull slopes gently to the nearly-parallel muzzle with no marked stop.

Ears – Set on top of the head, slightly above the eye level.

Eyes – The color should be darker than the coat. Relatively small, almond shaped, deeply set. The gaze is intelligent, confident and serious. Even small puppies demonstrate a serious and stern gaze typical of the breed.

Teeth - White, strong, well developed, closely set, meeting in a scissor bite.

Neck - Strong, well-muscled, moderately arched, not too long.

Body – Long, the index is 108-110%. The longish shape is mostly made up by the chest, and not the loin.

Chest – Broad and deep, slightly rounded, should descend below the elbow.

Flank – Continues the chest line, slightly tucked-up.

Withers – Moderately pronounced.

Back - Broad, straight, muscled and powerful.

Loin – Short and muscular.

Croup – Long, broad and level.

Tail - Set rather high, carried low in repose. When agitated, the tail is carried high, in a curve or scythe-like.

Forequarters - Straight and parallel. The shoulder blades are long and oblique, angulated at 108-110 degrees. The forearms are straight, powerful and parallel. The pasterns are long and well angulated.

Hindquarters – The thighs are long, thick and muscled. The upper thigh is the same length as the lower thigh, the stifle is well bent. The hock joint is well defined. The hock is strong and perpendicular to the ground.

Paws – Round, strong, compact, with elastic and soft pads.

Gait – Agile, smooth and balanced. The forearms and hind legs move in parallel.

Color – Brown color or spots are not desirable.

Coat – Usually short on the muzzle, ears and forequarters. Double coat, the undercoat should be well developed to protect the dog from the elements.

Size – 65 cm at the withers for males and 62cm for females. The weight should be according to the size, at least 45-50 kg, or 60 kg on the average.

Faults

- Any significant deviation from minimum size parameters quoted in this standard.
- Light colored eyes and nose.
- Excessively long, short or narrow muzzle.
- Yellow teeth.
- Round, protruding or bulging eyes.
- Square short body. Lacking good angulations at hindquarters and straight stifle.
- Sway or roach back, long loin, short croup.
- Any other bite but scissors.

Disqualifying features

- Markedly timid or aggressive behaviour.
- Lack of double coat, lack of undercoat.
- Bilateral or unilateral cryptorchidism.
- Blindness and deafness.

Final Comments

The Gampr is a working dog and may come in various types, depending on natural conditions and the field of work.

Balanced behaviour, health and build have a priority and preference over all other features.

The Gampr does not have hereditary or genetic diseases. It does not fall sick easily, but when it does, treatment is never easy. The Gampr almost never suffers from the cold, and feels fine in the wild nature, it loves soil and grass.

The impression projected by the Gampr should definitely be that of a powerful, athletic and smart dog. It is impossible to confuse Gampr, even from a long distance, with any other animal like bear, wolf or sheep.

Conclusion

The Armenian Gampr is the pride of the Armenians, an inseparable part of their history and culture.

At all times, Gamprs were exported from Armenia as very special and unique dogs. The blood of the Gampr flows in the veins of many modern dog breeds in all parts of the world. Sometimes, not all of the Gampr's unique features were needed elsewhere. In some countries, they were considered not big enough, while in others smaller dogs were needed; some believed that their color was not right, while others wanted them to have a different coat. Features developed and used centuries ago may not be relevant in a modern urban setting, and the man started changing and modifying the Gampr. Today's typical Caucasian shepherd dog (mountain dog) is quite different from the naturally bred dog, with its many working abilities and utilitarian features.

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