

Alaskan Malamute



Hailing from the rugged western area of Alaska, and taking his name from the Malamute settlement of the Eskimos, this dog has had to be hardy to stay alive. He is a really big dog, the male scaling well over a hundredweight and standing up to 71 centimetres (28 inches) at the shoulder. His purpose in life is to pull sledges and he can cope with prodigious loads, though he is not designed to be a racer. Although he is a truly handsome fellow, he does not have the spectacular glamour of his smaller sledding cousins.

The Malamute is a Nordic-type dog who moved into the northern Polar regions when people began to occupy the land. The Mahlemut tribes were a hard-working and skilled Inuit (Eskimo) race who loved and cared for their dogs, which were first discovered by settlers as far back as the 1750s. Though breed type was nearly lost by crossing with faster animals for sled racing, some Inuit continued to breed to type. Eventually promotion of the pure-bred Malamute was taken up by the American fancy.

Not only massively built, he is also dignified; this does not mean he lacks a sense of play, but he sometimes doesn't know his own strength. If he takes off after another dog, his handler needs good brakes.

His coat is thick in the coarse outer guard coat and in the woolly undercoat, so he doesn't notice the cold and will curl up and sleep in a blizzard which would send lesser canines running for shelter. Being large, he requires plenty of food for energy. Though he is not particularly fleet of foot, he likes his exercise, and is not a dog for the lazy.

What about Health Issues?

You may be aware that some breeds of dog (and crossbreeds too) can be susceptible to inherited disease. Of course you want to be sure that the puppy you choose is as healthy as possible, and you would like to know that it has not inherited any undesirable disease-causing genes from its parents. There is some help in that DNA tests for diseases in purebred dogs are available for some conditions in some breeds, but there are not very many such tests just yet! There are also, however, a number of clinical veterinary screening schemes that dog breeders can use to increase the probability of producing healthy puppies.

Details of the various screening schemes, both veterinary and DNA, that are available to breeders in the UK can be found on the Kennel Club's website at: www.thekennelclub.org.uk/doghealth

Puppy buyers should be aware that, at present, the application of various health screening results to breeding programmes is not always straightforward, and breeders may make choices for various reasons. A responsible breeder though, will always be willing to discuss relevant health issues with you. Breed clubs are often useful sources of breed-specific information.

And what health screening is relevant for the Alaskan Malamute?

Kennel Club Accredited Breeders must use, or are strongly recommended to use, the following screening schemes and/or advice for sires and dams:

- BVA/KC Hip Dysplasia Scheme
- BVA/KC/ISDS Eye Scheme
- Dams not to be mated before third season
- Dams not to whelp under two years of age
- Dams not to produce more than one litter within a 12 month period

This list is not necessarily comprehensive and you should still ask breeders and refer to breed clubs about health issues in the breed.