



Miniature American Shepherd

Group:	Pastoral, though not yet formally recognised by the UK Kennel Club
Country of origin:	USA
Original function:	Herding, droving and guarding sheep
Availability:	Expect to go on a waiting list
Average life span:	14 years
Age at maturity:	Around 2 years
Height:	Males 14-18 inches (35.5-45.5cm); females 13-17 inches (33-43cm)
Approximate weight:	25-35lb (11-16kg)
Is the breed a natural guard dog?	Yes, he is watchful over his family
With strangers?	May be initially reserved
Coat type:	A medium-length, weather-resistant double coat, with feathering on the backs of the legs and a discernible mane, which is more pronounced in males
Colours:	Black, blue merle, red, and red merle, with or without tan/white markings
Does the coat mat?	Only if neglected
Coat care:	The rich double coat needs brushing thoroughly down to the skin every other week; daily grooming needed when the coat sheds twice a year
Does the coat need professional grooming?	No
Special trimming for the show ring?	He should look natural, but some tidying is permitted
Exercise:	1-2 hours daily for a healthy adult
Average food bill:	£4 per week for an adult
Ease of training:	Very trainable
Temperament with children:	Good with older children; may be too boisterous for younger ones
With dogs?	Fine
With cats?	OK if socialised from young
Town or country dog?	Country
Would he happily live in a flat or apartment?	Not ideal
Will he live in a kennel if necessary?	Absolutely not – this Velcro dog needs human company
Does the breed suffer from the cold, wet or heat?	No
Hereditary anomalies?	See Dr Sargan's health MOT
Special considerations:	The Mini American needs human company, mental stimulation and sufficient daily exercise to thrive. Good, ongoing socialisation, starting early, is essential, as this dog has strong guarding tendencies
Character sketch:	A larger-than-life dog, with strong working instincts, this dog isn't for a first-timer, requiring a more experienced dog owner to fulfil his training needs.

Further Fido Facts

How many in rescue each year?	None. The small number of breeders in the UK are able to select only the ideal homes for their dogs. If something does go wrong, their comprehensive puppy contracts ensure the dogs return to the breeder. Contact the breed club below for more information.
Breed club:	The UK club is The United Kingdom Miniature American Shepherd Club (www.ukmasc.com) and is affiliated and recognised by the American parent body (www.mascusa.org). Membership is £10 per year, and the club sends out three e-newsletters a year and organises various events, such as herding trials. For details, contact the club through the website.

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Miniature American Shepherd Fido Facts

Fran Albisser gives her take on living with a Miniature American Shepherd

I don't remember a time when there wasn't a dog in my life. I was born in Basel, Switzerland, and the dog I grew up with was Tina, an Australian Shepherd cross. Tina was the love of my life. I did everything with her - agility, obedience, heelwork to music, canicross and scent work. She had it all: looks, drive and a wonderful, loving character. Around the time scientists were working on cloning Dolly the Sheep; I remember wishing I could clone my gorgeous Aussie cross.

Then someone came to agility

training with what looked like a miniature version of Tina. I asked what she was and the answer was, "A Mini Australian Shepherd." I loved the idea of a miniature version of Tina! Mini Aussies might be small, but they pack a punch, with the same attitude and characteristics as their larger cousins. I was hooked!

Three years ago, I brought black tricolor Mac and blue merle Yana over from Germany and Switzerland. I now own six Miniature American Shepherds (which is what they are registered

as with the American Kennel Club). As well as Mac and Yana, I have four-year-old Vips, two-year-old Miley, 15-month-old Bliss, and five-week-old Mojo, who will be coming home as soon as he is old enough. This breed is addictive!

Whenever I am out with my pack, they elicit a lot of interest. People often remark that they look like small Border Collies. Although they have been bred for a long time in the US, Mini Americans are still quite rare in the UK. Across the pond they are bred mainly for their working ability, although some are now being bred purely as family pets.

Personally, I think it is important to remember that these are working dogs, and they need a job to do, be that agility, obedience, heelwork to music or the herding that they were originally bred for. A Mini American will not be happy with a short daily walk in the park; this breed needs mental stimulation too - and if the owner does not provide enough, they will make their own entertainment, possibly with disastrous results for your soft furnishings!

Photo courtesy of Kilmhurst MAS (www.kilmhurst.com)



Mini Americans are fairly easy to train, but they pick up undesirable behaviours just as readily as desirable ones. They can be taught to do a huge variety of tricks - the famous Jay Sisler performed amazing routines with his standard Aussies at Wild West-style rodeos in the last century, and the Minis are just as athletic.

Active, busy little dogs, one of the hardest things I have found to teach them is 'time out'. I teach my dogs from a young age to settle down and have some quiet time, otherwise they would never stop!

This is a herding breed, but the Mini American works in a different way to the Border Collie. The collie uses 'eye and stalk' behaviour to move livestock and works them from behind. The Mini gets right in there, and will nip their heels if the cattle or sheep are not doing as they are told.

A fair amount of barking is involved in this activity, and Minis, like standard Australian Shepherds, have a reputation for being excitable and noisy. It can be difficult, but it is vital to control the vocal exuberance, unless you have no near neighbours!

I keep my dogs stimulated on walks by asking them to do little tricks - sending them round a tree or weaving them through my legs. Minis are fine with dog-savvy children,

and if you are prepared to give them enough stimulation, mental as well as physical, then one would make a family pet, but you need to let the breeder know that this is what you are looking for. Do your research, and, of course, be prepared to wait for your perfect puppy.

These are affectionate dogs, who are very loyal to their owners. Some of mine are real cuddle-monsters, always wanting to curl up on my lap, while others are happy just to be close enough for a little fuss. They are sociable dogs and love to run and chase one another around. I'm not sure how happy one would be as an only dog, but probably fine as long as he had regular playtime with other dogs. Again, it is important to talk this through with the breeder.

Mini Americans are pretty easy-care, though they do have a tendency to jump into every puddle they come across. Their coat just needs a good brush through once or twice a week to tidy them up and remove any knots, and to have their ears and paws trimmed. It only takes a few minutes, and they enjoy the attention.

As the name implies, Mini American Shepherds are small in stature, but what they lack in size they make up for in character. They are fun-loving, versatile dogs, and I simply can't imagine life without them! ●



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Miniature American Shepherd
Fido Facts

Justine Hankins looks at the history of the Miniature American Shepherd

The Miniature American Shepherd - now there's a dog with a name that doesn't seem too difficult to grasp. You've probably never seen one, but you'd guess that it was small, came from the United States, and that it does stuff with sheep - at least originally, anyway.

But this breed's name hides a multitude of controversies. Most dog breeds come about because a small group of enthusiasts think they should. They selectively breed, develop a standard, and lobby for official recognition. They start with their national kennel club and eventually, if things go to plan, the breed is recognised by kennel clubs throughout the world. They often call their canine creation after the place they live in or the thing the dog does best, or sometimes both. But the Miniature American Shepherd has broken some of these conventions.

First up, this diminutive pastoralist was actually called the Miniature Australian Shepherd ('Mini Aussie') until three years ago. To appear to move identity



from one country to another would be a bit of an upheaval, but to move continents is quite a serious step.

To muddy the waters even further, the Australian Shepherd, of whatever size, is not even an Australian breed. No, of course not. The Australian Shepherd is an American breed. Nobody is entirely sure why the word 'Australian' was used in the first place. Go figure, as they say in the States.

These things happen in dogdom. The Rough-haired Pinscher became a Schnauzer, the German Poodle became the toast of Paris, and the Labrador - named after a province

of Canada - became as British as tea on the lawn. Anyway, moving on...

The wholly American 'Australian' Shepherd originated in the late 1800s in California, selectively developed from a variety of pastoral breeds and types, to become a distinctive working dog suitable for the demanding life on farms and ranches.

During the 1950s and 60s it came to the wider public attention by becoming associated with cowboys and sometimes did a star turn at rodeo shows. It wasn't long

The Miniature American Shepherd Dogs featured on these pages are Mac, Miley, Vips and Bliss, owned by Fran Albisser; Heidi, owned by Christine Bailey; Bing, owned by Hannah Banks; Boomerang, owned by Victoria Harrild-Jones.

Studio photos:
Tim Rose at www.timrosephotography.co.uk

Alternative breed photos:
Tim Rose

Model dogs...

before an experienced horsewoman and long-term Australian Shepherd fan developed a breeding programme for the smaller versions of this dog, that would become known as the Miniature Australian Shepherd.

While this breeding programme aimed to produce smaller examples of the breed, great care was also taken to ensure that nothing of the classic Aussie work ethic, intelligence, drive or substance was lost. 'Smaller' refers to body proportions alone. These dogs remained true to their origins as formidable working dogs and became the original 'Mini but Mighty'.

So, this dog has actually been around for quite a while, but official recognition has proved elusive. The reason for this is down to an administrative decision. The American Kennel Club has a policy of not recognising size variations of established breeds as a new dog. So there won't be any Giant Chihuahuas or Toy Dobermanns. In addition, some people in the Australian Shepherd fraternity are not happy for their breed's smaller representatives to be recognised at all. The easy way round this was just to change the breed's name - hence the dog formerly known as the Miniature Australian becoming the Miniature American. This change saw the breed being recognised as a developing breed by the AKC in 2011.

Dog people can be a tad catty when it comes to defending what they perceive as the best interests of their breed, so not everyone is embracing the AKC's decision. Some are sticking to the Australian



The first MAS arrived in this country in 2005 under their previous title of Miniature Australian Shepherds. The breed rapidly acquired admirers and enthusiasts and currently numbers some 100 dogs

name, no matter what, and there are Australian Shepherd people strongly resisting the very idea of a miniature version of their breed whichever continent it's called after. Still, the Miniature American Shepherd seems like a perfectly lovely dog - so perhaps everyone will calm down eventually.

The MAS as a breed is currently entered on the AKC Foundation Stock Service, pending full recognition, which is timetabled for 2015. At that stage Kennel Clubs around the world, including the UK one, will be able to place the MAS on their Breed Import Register.

The first MAS arrived in this

country in 2005 under their previous title of Miniature Australian Shepherds. The breed rapidly acquired admirers and enthusiasts and currently numbers some 100 dogs, which are either UK-bred or imported. Most breeders in the UK now have their dogs registered as AKC Miniature American Shepherds. In 2013 The United Kingdom Miniature American Shepherd Club adopted the new name, after some deliberation.

Now the breed has got its foot in the door of official recognition, it could be only a matter of time before there's another name on the pastoral group list... ●



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Miniature American Shepherd Fido Facts

Geneticist **Dr David Sargan** performs a health MOT on the Miniature American Shepherd

Miniature American Shepherds (previously known as Miniature Australian Shepherds) were developed from Californian stock-tending Australian Shepherds simply by selection for small size.

The breed has only been recognised by registries in the USA in the last 25 years, and imports into the UK began only in 2005. Consequently, health records for the breed are relatively sparse and many of the dogs in the UK are still young, so a complete health picture is hard to provide, although the breed club in this country states that it uses the health tests available for Aussie Shepherds and has records of parents. Fortunately, potential owners can also look to the health of the breed in America for guidance.

Drug toxicity
Approximately half of Miniature American Shepherds can suffer adverse reactions to a wide but defined range of drugs that are commonly used on other dogs.

This is because of a gene mutation in the susceptible animals, resulting in drugs accumulating to high and toxic levels in the brain and elsewhere.

The mutation causes severe effects when inherited from both parents, but there may be mild effects with some drugs, even when the dog is a carrier of the mutation, having inherited effects from only one parent.

The list of drugs that are problematic is long, including a number of anti-parasitic and worming agents, loperamide (an anti-diarrhoea drug), many anti-cancer drugs and others.

A DNA-based test for the gene (known as MDR1) is available through a variety of laboratories listed at www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/14688/dnatests_worldwide.pdf

If buying a pup, make sure that the parents have been tested for the mutation, and, at worst, that only one is a carrier and the other is clear. In the latter case, make sure the pups have also been

tested and that you know the status of your own pup.

Eye problems

Australian Shepherds suffer a number of inherited eye problems, although most of these diseases are individually quite rare. It is likely that some of these also occur in Miniature American Shepherds. They include a slowly blinding degeneration of eyesight in middle-age called progressive retinal atrophy or PRA (specifically a form of PRA known as prcd) and a condition called collie eye anomaly, relating to the development of choroid layer of the eye. CEA has variable severity, with about three-quarters of cases having only minor consequences. Unfortunately it can also cause severe vision defects, and is present from birth.

DNA-based tests are available for both of these diseases, and both cases are recessive: that is, the affected animals must inherit the mutant gene from both mother and father.

Persistent pupillary membrane (PPM) is another eye-development disease in which a membrane present in the eye before birth fails to be entirely cleared afterwards and may obstruct the pupil and cause minor visual defects.

Juvenile cataracts (opacity of the lens) are also a serious issue in Miniature American Shepherds, as they may progress to serious vision loss by two to five years of age.

For PPM and juvenile cataracts, there are clear inherited components, but a DNA test available for cataracts in a number of other breeds detects only a proportion of Australian Shepherds with the problem. How well it works for Miniature American Shepherds is not known.

Skeletal/developmental

Hip dysplasia and arthritis are known problems for some Miniature American Shepherds. Those buying puppies should make sure that parents have been hip tested and that the hip scores are below the median for the Australian Shepherd Dog (currently 9).

Intervertebral disc disease,



patellar luxation and elbow disease are uncommon, but do occur.

Usually of less severity are misplaced teeth and undershot jaws, as well as umbilical hernias. But these should be avoided if encountered (or if present in the parents) when buying a puppy.

Glandular problems

Hypothyroidism causes symmetrical hair loss in some Miniature American Shepherds, while the remaining coat tends to be greasy. This is accompanied by lethargy and a slow heart rate. This condition occurs in many breeds and can be treated medically.

Epilepsy and Tremors

Epilepsy is seen as a disease mainly of middle-aged Australian Shepherds, and the breed club reports that this frightening condition is present in the

Miniature American Shepherd as well, although there are few detailed reports. It can have an earlier onset, and seizures often recur in animals prone to them. Veterinary treatment is usually effective. Again, try to make sure that the ancestors of any pup you buy are clear of the disease.

Less major neurological problems, such as occasional tremors, have also been reported.

In conclusion

Miniature American Shepherds are long lived, with many reaching above 14 years and up to 18 years. Cancer is a fairly frequent cause of death, but often this is in old age. Although the small numbers of these dogs mean that health information about the breed is incomplete in the UK, Miniature American Shepherds are likely to be fairly healthy companions for a long time. ●



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