



## *United Kingdom Miniature American Shepherd Club*

### MAS - The Alternative Breed Standard

*This article whilst originally written about Australian Shepherds, is equally valid for MAS as they share all the breed traits except size. This excellent article sheds more light onto what it's like to live with this type of dog.*

The Miniature American Shepherd, like its ancestor the Australian Shepherd, is one of the most versatile breeds in the dog kingdom today. They are a breed whose cloudy origins lie in the mid 1800's with the cattle ranchers and shepherds of the Western United States. The true versatility and unique characteristics of the Australian Shepherds emerged from the ranches in the early 1900's coming to the attention and appreciation of a wider audience. By the 1960's the smaller variety of Aussie became popular with enthusiasts and eventually in 2011, were granted the status of their own breed with a new name - the Miniature American Shepherd.

The characteristics and temperaments of Aussies and MAS are unique and shared in many ways. Although normally silent working dogs, MAS can be very vocal when playing with other dogs and companions. When they are happy to see you or you are praising them they will make a singing noise, talking to you in various degrees of sound from a deep howl to a high whine. Their bark usually has a gruff, earthy quality and many MAS have a tendency to grin. The grin can be anything from a slight curling at the corners of their lips to a full-fledged curling showing their teeth like a snarl. The grin is usually accompanied with a wagging of their tail or wiggling of the body and squinting of the eyes. An MAS that is especially happy to see you will often approach with the whole body in a horse-shoe shape, bending his back so his head and his butt arrive at the same time – the head with a huge, toothy grin and the butt for a huge rub! (MAS just love having their hips/butts rubbed!)

Some MAS snap their teeth together making a clicking noise when they are happy or excited. To get your attention they will use a myriad of various methods such as pushing their cold, wet nose up under your arm or hand (heart attack material,) bumping you on the back of your leg with their nose as you walk (guaranteed to unbalance) and they will even prod or bat you with their paw. MAS are very handy in using their front feet; not only will they want to put their paw on your knee for attention, they will use them while playing with their companions or their toys. They also use their front legs and feet to

wash their faces like a cat and to hold their bones while chewing. Many will cross their front legs while lying down.

Even though the MAS will greet their family and friends with exuberant, energetic displays of joy, do not expect your MAS to welcome strangers. MAS are formidable guardians of house and home, powerful and determined defenders of their domain. Strangers will be greeted cautiously and treated to a full check including some pretty rude staring, until the MAS is happy that the intruder presents no threat. Once a friend always a friend, but always on MAS terms. MAS puppies need lots of regular, ongoing and positive socialisation with people and places to make sure their natural reserve with strangers doesn't develop into antisocial behaviour. An antisocial MAS is a very big problem for all concerned.

MAS like to put their head on objects such as chair rungs, steps, rocks and your feet. If allowed up on a sofa they will take full advantage of a cushion, using it as a pillow just like we would. Outside, especially in warm weather, they will dig a bed in the ground and leave a nice rim to rest their head on.

Even though they will dig, play in water and get dirt on them, they are in fact a very clean dog, spending a good amount of time licking themselves and others clean. They enjoy grooming their companions. A mother will clean her puppies and herself at great length. Because MAS are so clean they are easily house-trained.

MAS are easy to groom and need only a good, deep brush through their soft double coat every other week, to remove dirt and old hair. A quick trim of any long fur under and around their paw pads, a nail clip and a tidy of any raggle-taggle hair behind their ears if necessary and they're good to go. Twice a year be prepared for the MAS to 'blow' their coat. The dense, soft undercoat gets shed by the handful; your entire house will be carpeted with fur and your vacuum cleaner will be working double shifts.

MAS are a very athletic dog and can leap great heights, either over fences or straight up and down like a yo-yo. (An MAS can easily reach your head-height!) They will climb trees, fences, walls or ladders if there is something that in their opinion, is worth reaching. Your garden fence or a wall is neither a barrier nor a boundary to an MAS, it is a challenge and an opportunity.

They make excellent house companions provided they receive enough mental and physical exercise each day. They are very playful and love to race and jump with other dogs they know. They will stalk the other dog, often using their innate eye, and then suddenly they will charge the other dog and try to roll it or just wrestle. They will play with you as well and will enjoy it immensely.

Bred to withstand the rigours of many days or weeks on the cattle trail, shepherding from the high mountain passes to the lowland pastures, enduring extremes of weather and a hefty kick from a steer whilst continuing to work, an MAS is the perfect choice of companion if you like the great outdoors. Twice-daily walks of two hours each will do nothing to dent the energy or enthusiasm levels of an MAS. Trying to get away with the occasional, on-lead amble around the block is just asking for trouble. MAS crave exercise and

above all, company. You cannot shut this breed away all day alone, while you go to work. Your MAS will become bored, depressed, destructive and problematic. An MAS is your absolute devoted companion all day, every day. He will accompany you everywhere, including the bathroom if you forget to lock the door ... Some people can find this extreme level of attachment to be too intense, clinging and almost claustrophobic.

The MAS has a natural love for water. An MAS will swim in a pond or up and down a stream for the sheer delight of swimming. Some will splash the water on purpose and try to catch the splashes. An MAS will arrive on site just seconds after a water hose is uncoiled. They love to retrieve sticks and balls thrown into water and will actually dive to find the objects. They will plunge into a ditch, puddle or water trough after working or playing hard to cool off and sometimes will try to climb into their water buckets; in other words, any water will do! Water bowls, buckets, puddles (the muddier the better,) ditches, brooks, streams, rivers, canals, lakes – they all belong to the MAS. The other great love of the MAS, is food. His food, your food, anybody's food. MAS are deeply food motivated. This, coupled with their strong 'eye' and prey drive, is a powerful training motivator.

MAS need to be trained, they need to have a job. They can excel in just about any dog activity available; herding, field trials, tracking, obedience, agility, flyball, heelwork to music, therapy and assistance dogs ... However although they are very intelligent and easily trained, be warned - MAS do not accept instruction or command without thinking it through. Some breeds just need to be shown 'how' to do something. MAS need to know 'why' they should do it as well. They're great thinkers and problem-solvers. If they can't see the reason behind what you want them to do, they will either simply refuse to do it, or they'll devise an alternative way to complete the task that they see as better, and that will probably be a way you hadn't anticipated, or don't view as appropriate. This can look like the MAS is being stubborn, when in fact it's simply him using his very active brain. Be prepared for a battle of minds, because you won't nag or order an MAS into anything. You can negotiate (very successfully) but you can forget dictate.

Still think this amazing breed is for you? Let's talk.