BRIARD

History and General Information on the Briard

The Briard, or Chien Berger de Brie, is an ancient working breed of France, dating back to the eighth century. Early tapestries depict these large shaggy dogs with the Emperor Charlemagne, and Napoleon was also reported to have had Briards. The Briard has been used since early times as a guardian of the flocks and a herding dog. He has been the official dog of the French army. He was used to carry supplies to the front lines and served as a sentry dog. Due to his keen hearing, reputed to be the most acute of any breed, he was used by the medical corps to search for wounded soldiers. The reports stress the amazing ability of the Briard to lead the corpsmen to those who still had a spark of life in their bodies. It was said that any man the Briard passed by was beyond assistance.

For centuries the Briard was used as both shepherd and guardian, protecting the flock primarily from wolves, wild boar and poachers. Although not a traditional flock guardian such as the Great Pyrenees or Anatolian Shepherd, the Briard still retains a high degree of its protective nature. The breed’s development as a boundary oriented herding dog is due in large measure to the changes in France following the French Revolution of 1789. The large landholdings were broken up, and rather than functioning as estate and livestock guardians, the breed found its primary role to be that of a herding and general use farm dog. One of those uses was to keep sheep within the confines of largely unfenced but specifically allotted tracts of land.

Today the farms of Western Europe are generally small landholdings usually cooperative or tenanted. The sheep are kept in large barns at night and led to pasture each morning by the shepherd, who walks along the road with the flock strung out behind him and kept in procession by the dogs. The pasture/graze may be as small as an acre and flanked by orchards or fields of vegetables or other crops. The dog's duty now is to keep the sheep contained in the graze area as the shepherd is subject to a considerable fine if the sheep get into the crops. In order to do this the dogs become a “living fence” around the graze circumference, constantly patrolling the perimeter, working as a team with the shepherd to maintain a peaceful environment for the flock, but never allowing any to stray. The dogs work mostly at the trot but may gallop occasionally if it appears that a border might be breached. In most cases two dogs are used, each patrolling two sides of the area, but in some cases it's a single dog working the boundary closest to the sheep. The dogs are in motion almost constantly, trotting back and forth to keep their charges out of mischief.
Bravery, loyalty and intelligence form the basic character of the Briard. His herding instincts and well-balanced character make him an ideal family dog and guardian of the home. His natural aloof instinct towards strangers can have a strong influence on his behavior as an adult dog. The Briard can have definite opinions about their world and many are readily willing to demonstrate their viewpoint. Therefore, the breed is best in the hands of owners who are clear about leadership, creating boundaries and setting limits for behavior.

**AKC Briard Breed Standard**

Please note: the **AKC Briard Standard appears in bold face** and the commentary in normal face.

**General Appearance**

A dog of handsome form. Vigorous and alert, powerful without coarseness, strong in bone and muscle, exhibiting the strength and agility required of the herding dog. Dogs lacking these qualities, however concealed by the coat, are to be penalized.

The Briard is a handsome, sound, alert, well-angulated dog of medium size and balanced proportions. This shepherd dog exhibits strength and agility, as well as power with flexibility. The coat should not mask the underlying structure. The Briard must possess the structural integrity necessary to keep him on the move for long hours as he keeps his flock within the boundaries of the graze.

**Size, Proportions**

**Size** - males 23 to 27 inches at the withers; bitches 22 to 25 1/2 inches at the withers. **Disqualification** - all dogs or bitches under the minimum.

While the standard disqualifies only for undersize, oversize must also be considered a major concern. Too large a dog tends to be coarse or cumbersome and lacks the agility and endurance necessary to perform its primary function. Briards of minimum size must still possess the substance
necessary for power and stamina. A leeway of four inches for dogs and three and a half inches for bitches gives an ample range of size as described in the standard. It must be pointed out that in comparing a dog and a bitch, a 23 inch male is just as correct as a 25 1/2 inch bitch. However, the dog must appear masculine and the bitch feminine, irrespective of size. Should you question the height of any exhibit, it is necessary to measure the dog to ensure it makes the minimum height requirement as required by the AKC standard for the breed.

Proportions - the Briard is not cobby in build. In males the length of the body, measured from the point of the shoulder to the point of the buttock, is equal to or slightly more than his height at the withers. The female may be a little longer.

The Briard is neither cobby nor long of body. Careful attention must be paid to the points of reference when considering proportions... “measured from the point of the shoulder to the point of the buttock, is equal to or slightly more than his height at the withers”. Being a long-coated and tailed breed calling for a “moderately advanced breast bone”, the Briard will appear off-square.

The standard clearly identifies the points of reference to use for measurement. “Equal to” describes a square. The word “slightly” is generally defined as imperceptibly, hardly, minimally (referring to smallness). “Slightly more than” refers to a small increment longer.

Proportion has a direct influence on gait. Proper proportion provides the appropriate relationship of each part of the skeletal framework which in turn allows for the ability to cover ground with minimal effort, make abrupt changes in direction and gather speed efficiently.

Head

The head of a Briard always gives the impression of length, having sufficient width without being cumbersome. The correct length of a good head, measured from the occiput to the tip of the nose, is about forty (40%) per cent of the height of the dog at the withers. There is no objection to a slightly longer head, especially if the animal tends to a longer body line.
While the Briard is not to be considered a “head breed”, the standard is quite specific in the detailing of its distinguishing characteristics. The head is rather long and rectangular. Using the percentage stated in the standard, a 25 inch dog (or bitch) would have a 10 inch length of head; a 27 inch dog would have a head length of approximately 11 inches. The head should complete the overall picture of the well-balanced dog.

Viewed from above, from the front or in profile, the fully-coated silhouette gives the impression of two rectangular forms, equal in length but differing in height and width, blending together rather abruptly. The larger rectangle is the skull and the other forms the muzzle.

The lengths of the two rectangular forms are equal and are on separate but parallel planes. The width of the skull measures slightly less than the length of the skull from occiput to stop. This describes the illusion created by the fully-coated silhouettes of the head, with nothing being rounded or tapered. To fully examine the head, one must feel the shapes and planes beneath the coat.

The head joins the neck in a right angle and is held proudly alert. The head is sculptured in clean lines, without jowls or excess flesh on the sides, or under the eyes or temples.

The phrase “the head joins the neck in a right angle and is held proudly alert” is often misunderstood and refers to the Briard standing in profile, not in motion. This does NOT imply that the neck is held in a vertical line but rather that the neck (the cervical vertebrae of the spine) joins the base of the skull at a right angle. The shape and lines of the head are clearly distinguished and without excess flesh. There is good fill under the eyes and each part of the head blends smoothly and cleanly into the other.

Expression - the gaze is frank, questioning and confident.

The expression is that of a calm but alert, self-confident, intelligent animal. Sometimes a trace of mischief will be shown, especially in young dogs.
Eyes – the eyes set well apart with the inner corners and outer corners on the same level. Large, well opened and calm, they must never be narrow or slanted. The color must be black or black-brown with very dark pigmentation of the rim of the eyelids, whatever the color of the coat. Disqualification - yellow eyes or spotted eyes.

The eyes of the Briard are large, very dark, and set well apart. The correct width and length of the skull, joining at the well-marked stop, provides for the placement and width of the orbital sockets. This allows for the set of the well-opened eyes which are never narrow, slanted, or bulging.

The color of the eye must be black or black-brown, regardless of the color of the coat. Very dark pigmentation of the rim of the eyelids provides the outline of the eye shape, highlighting the calm expression. In some Briards, dark pigmentation extends beyond the rim of the eye.

Ears - the ears should be attached high, have thick leather and be firm at the base. Low-set ears cause the head to appear to be too arched. The length of the natural ear should be equal to or slightly less than one-half the length of the head, always straight and covered with long hair. The natural ear must not lie flat against the head and, when alert, the ears are lifted slightly, giving a square look to the top of the skull. The ears when cropped should be carried upright and parallel, emphasizing the parallel lines of the head; when alert, they should face forward, well open with long hair falling over the opening. The cropped ear should be long, broad at the base, tapering gradually to a rounded tip.

The ears of the Briard may be natural or cropped. No preference should be given to either. The natural ear should be about equal to half the length of the head. The longer ear fringe will conceal the length and rounded end shape of the natural ear. The natural ears are slightly lifted when the dog is alert and give a square appearance to the top of the head. The natural ear should not lie flat against the head due to its set and firm attachment at its base. There are various styles of ear cropping, some which are longer and/or more tapered than others. If cropped, the ears should stand upright with the ear opening facing forward when alert. Long ear fringes will fall over the opening of the ear. Again, no preference is given to either the cropped or natural ear. In either case, the ears are expressive and mobile, and not
necessarily in a constant state of alert.

Skull - the width of the head, as measured across the skull, is slightly less than the length of the skull from the occiput to the stop. Although not clearly visible on the fully-coated head, the occiput is prominent and the forehead is very slightly rounded.

The skull of the Briard viewed from the side or from above should form a rectangle, slightly longer than it is wide. The occiput is prominent to the touch.

Muzzle - the muzzle with mustache and beard is somewhat wide and terminates in a right angle. The muzzle must not be narrow or pointed.

The fully coated muzzle with the mustache is wide in appearance and terminates in a right angle with the square, almost flat surface of the nose. The beard continues the line of the right angle. It is imperative that the muzzle is rectangular.

Planes - the topline of the muzzle is parallel to the topline of the skull, and the junction of the two forms a well-marked stop, which is midway between the occiput and the tip of the nose, and on a level with the eyes.

The topline of the muzzle is parallel to the topline of the skull. Deviations such as down-faced, dish-faced or domed head create lines which are not parallel and therefore are not correct. The stop, which is on the level of the eyes, is well marked but not so much as to form a right angle; it divides the length of the head into two equal parts.

Nose - square rather than round, always black with nostrils well opened. Disqualification - any color other than black.

Square and always black, no matter the color of the coat. The nose forms a right angle with the topline of the muzzle.
Lips - the lips are of medium thickness, firm of line and fitted neatly, without folds or flews at the corners. The lips are black.

Bite, Teeth - strong, white and adapting perfectly in a scissors bite.

The standard does not call for the examiner to count teeth. Normal dentition is expected, as is a scissors bite with large, healthy white teeth.

Neck, Topline and Body

Neck - strong and well constructed, the neck is in the shape of a truncated cone, clearing the shoulders well. It is strongly muscled and has good length.

The Briard must have a strong neck to be compatible with the rest of his conformation. When the dog is alert, the neck and head are held high. However, the Briard should extend the head and neck forward when moving.

Topline - the Briard is constructed with a very slight incline, downward from the prominent withers to the back which is straight, to the broad loin and the croup which is slightly inclined. The croup is well muscled and slightly sloped to give a well-rounded finish. The topline is strong, never swayed nor roached.

The strong topline slopes slightly from the withers to the straight back, broad loin, and gently-rounded croup. The croup must be long enough to provide strong attachment and leverage for the powerful muscles of the hindquarters.

Body - the chest is broad and deep with moderately curved ribs, egg-shaped in form, the ribs not too rounded. The breastbone is moderately advanced in front, descending smoothly to the level of the elbows and shaped to give good depth to the chest. The abdomen is moderately drawn up but still presents good volume.
Lung capacity is vital to the stamina of the herding dog. The broad and deep chest of the Briard has well developed muscle on the breastbone. The breast bone itself should be detectable upon examination. There is a smooth curve of breast-bone and ribs which descends to the level of the elbows. The shepherd dog requires ample room for heart and lungs.

The dimensions of the chest are important to the balanced, sturdy appearance of the Briard. When viewed from above, the rib cage should have the moderate oval shape of an egg. Any tendency to deviate from the correctly shaped rib cage, such as being shelly, slab-sided or round/barrel-sided, should be avoided.

Tail - uncut, well feathered, forming a crook at the extremity, carried low and not deviating to the right or to the left. In repose, the bone of the tail descends to the point of the hock, terminating in the crook, similar in shape to the printed “J” when viewed from the dog's right side. In action, the tail is raised in a harmonious curve, never going above the level of the back, except for the terminal crook. Disqualification - Tail non-existent or cut.

The outline of the Briard is completed by a breed hallmark, the distinct tail, with a crook at the end. The crook is not closed too tightly as to form a ring, nor should it be an open, saber or sickle curve. The shape of the crook is sometimes not apparent when the dog is relaxed or in repose, but is usually seen when the animal is in motion.

The tail is set smoothly into the gently sloped croup, an extension of the spine. The tail is also important for its utility in assisting with balance and direction, acting as a rudder in abrupt turns.

When excited, the Briard may raise the tail above the the back momentarily, but it should neither be carried that way nor should it be rolled up over the croup.

Forequarters

Shoulder blades are long and sloping forming a 45-degree angle with the horizontal, firmly attached by strong muscles and blending smoothly with the withers.

A well-angulated shoulder assembly is vital to the reach, desired balance,
Legs - the legs are powerfully muscled with strong bone. The forelegs are vertical when viewed from the side except the pasterns are very slightly inclined. Viewed from the front or rear, the legs are straight and parallel to the median line of the body, never turned inward or outward. The distance between the front legs is equal to the distance between the rear legs. The construction of the legs is of utmost importance, determining the dog's ability to work and his resistance to fatigue.

“Strong bone” as used in the standard, does not mean heavy or coarse. Naturally, bone substance must be appropriate for the size of each exhibit.

Dewclaws - dewclaws on the forelegs may or may not be removed.

Feet - strong and rounded, being slightly oval in shape. The feet travel straight forward in the line of movement. The toes are strong, well arched and compact. The pads are well developed, compact and elastic, covered with strong tissue. The nails are always black and hard.

The pasterns are very slightly inclined, providing for shock absorption.

Hindquarters

The hindquarters are powerful, providing flexible, almost tireless movement. The pelvis slopes at a 30-degree angle from the horizontal and forms a right angle with the upper leg bone.

The Briard is above all a trotting dog with rear angulation in balance with the forequarters. The joints must be flexible and the muscles powerful to enable the dog to perform sudden stops and quick turns used in his tasks, providing the nearly “tireless movement” of a boundary herder. Turned out stifles, cow hocks, hocks that lack extension and sickle hocks are undesirable.

Legs - viewed from the side, the legs are well-angulated with the
metatarsus slightly inclined, the hock making an angle of 135 degrees.

Dewclaws - two dewclaws are required on each rear leg, placed low on the leg, giving a wide base to the foot. Occasionally the nail may break off completely. The dog shall not be penalized for the missing nail so long as the digit itself is present. Ideally the dewclaws form additional functioning toes. Disqualification - anything less than two dewclaws on each rear leg.

Double dewclaws on each rear leg are another unique breed characteristic of the Briard. When checking the dewclaws, you are not looking for additional nails. Rather, you are looking for the presence of two additional digits, which may or may not include a nail. The standard clearly states that “ideally the dewclaws form additional functioning toes” and in some cases a judge may not be able to feel the dewclaws by running the hand up from the base of the foot. When in doubt, the judge should lift the dog’s rear foot (or request the handler to do so) and count the digits. The dewclaws may also be found higher on the inside of the rear pastern. Additional digits have been noted on some exhibits and should not be faulted.

Feet - if the rear toes turn out very slightly when the hocks and metatarsus are parallel, then the position of the feet is correct.

Coat

The outer coat is coarse, hard and dry (making a dry rasping sound between the fingers). It lies down flat, falling naturally in long, slightly waving locks, having the sheen of good health. On the shoulders the length of the hair is generally six inches or more. The undercoat is fine and tight on all the body. The head is well covered with hair which lies down, forming a natural part in the center. The eyebrows do not lie flat but, instead, arch up and out in a curve that lightly veils the eyes. The hair is never so abundant that it masks the form of the head or completely covers the eyes.

The proper Briard coat does not require elaborate grooming. In order to evaluate correct coat the Briard should be presented clean, free of tangles,
mats and foreign substances. Other than trimming of the feet for a tidy presentation, any trimming which alters the natural appearance of the Briard is to be avoided. The length of coat described in the standard is often not apparent until 3-4 years of age and may not be maintained if the Briard is also working. No additional credit should be given for extra length of coat.

The coat on the head should enhance rather than mask the shape of the head. The coat on the top skull parts naturally; the coat of the brow should arch forward over the eyes.

**Color**

All uniform colors are permitted except white. The colors are black, various shades of gray and various shades of tawny. The deeper shades of each color are preferred. Combinations of two of these colors are permitted, provided there are no marked spots and the transition from one color to another takes place gradually and symmetrically. The only permissible white: white hairs scattered throughout the coat and/or a white spot on the chest not to exceed one inch in diameter at the root of the hair. *Disqualification* - white coat, spotted coat, white spot on chest exceeding one inch in diameter.

Deeper color refers to the depth of pigment in the hair; this is true of black, tawny or gray Briards. From birth to six years of age, and sometimes later, the Briard coat color often changes very drastically.

Many Briards have a sprinkling of white or gray hairs throughout the coat, which is a perfectly acceptable mingling of color. Tawny puppies are born very dark or reddish brown and usually lighten until about two years of age; the color then deepens until 4-6 years of age. Tawnies may also have a mingling of color in the coat. You may also see lighter legs and darker color on the back and/or shoulders. If gradual and symmetrical, this is acceptable. The gray is born black and gradually changes to gray over a period of time, generally beginning at the feet and moving upward. You might also see a black or a gray with a reddish cast to its coat during the change process. There is absolutely no preference given to one color over another. The disqualifiable white coat (like that of a Samoyed) should not be confused with pale tawny. To determine whether there is a white spot on the chest exceeding 1 inch in diameter, the examiner must part the coat to first determine if a white spot exists and then measure its diameter at the skin.
Gait

The well-constructed Briard is a marvel of supple power. His movement has been described as "quicksilver", permitting him to make abrupt turns, springing starts and sudden stops required of the shepherding dog. His gait is supple and light, almost like that of a large feline. The gait gives the impression that the dog glides along without touching the ground. Strong, flexible movement is essential to the sheepdog. He is above all a trotter, single-tracking, occasionally galloping and he frequently needs to change his speed to accomplish his work. His conformation is harmoniously balanced and strong to sustain him in the long day's work. Dogs with clumsy or inelegant gait must be penalized.

The Briard should have good forward reach with strong drive and extension in the rear. It is a fluid, ground-covering trot showing minimal expenditure of energy. While the gait appears effortless, it is powerful with beautifully coordinated efficiency. There should be no lifting or hackney motion in the front, lack of coordination between the front and rear assemblies, heavy or pounding action. A penalty must be assessed for dogs that move with clumsy or inelegant gait.

From the front and rear the Briard should move true and strong, converging to single track when speed is increased. Dewclaws placed low on the rear legs give a wide base to the foot and can influence the structural position of the other toes. In this instance, although the rear pasterns should be parallel to each other, an uneducated eye may perceive “toeing out”. When alert, a standing Briard will hold its head high, but when moving the head and neck should be extended forward. Handlers are encouraged to present their Briards on a loose lead, thereby allowing the dog to have free and flexible movement. A loose lead allows the judge in the ring to observe the exhibit's actual head carriage unencumbered by the restraint of a tight lead. Briard movement clearly displays the balance, power, flexibility and soundness synonymous with its correct structure.

Temperament

He is a dog of heart, with spirit and initiative, wise and fearless with no trace of timidity. Intelligent, easily trained, faithful, gentle, and obedient, the Briard possesses an excellent memory and an ardent desire to
please his master. He retains a high degree of his ancestral instinct to guard home and master. Although he is reserved with strangers, he is loving and loyal to those he knows. Some will display a certain independence.

The Briard should be confident, self-assured, assertive but never aggressive, enthusiastic but not out of control; tolerant of strangers but watchful rather than suspicious. Puppies may tend to be more cautious of strangers, though many are exuberant, but should never back away in fear nor show aggression.

The well-raised and trained Briard will stand for examination. He should be approached in a calm, matter of fact manner on the part of the examiner. The Briard should not be approached slowly or tentatively, nor should strong, sustained eye contact be made.

**Disqualifications:**

- All dogs or bitches under the minimum size limits.
- Yellow eyes or spotted eyes.
- Nose any color other than black.
- Tail non-existent or cut.
- Less than two dewclaws on each rear leg.
- White coat.
- Spotted coat.
- White spot on chest exceeding one inch in diameter.

There are two penalizations under the breed standard:

- A dog of handsome form. Vigorous and alert, powerful without coarseness, strong in bone and muscle, exhibiting the strength and agility required of the herding dog. Dogs lacking these qualities, however concealed by the coat, are to be penalized.

- Dogs with clumsy or inelegant gait must be penalized.

Approved February 8, 1975
Reformatted January 12, 1992
Examining the Briard

The Briard should be approached calmly with assurance and self-confidence on the part of the examiner. The Briard should stand his ground without cringing or menacing the examiner. All judges are expected to check for each of the Briard’s disqualifications. If a Briard does not appear to meet the minimum height requirement for its sex, it is incumbent upon the judge to request a wicket and measure the dog.

Bearing in mind that the head is coated, approach from the front so the dog can see you and be aware of your presence. Place one hand under the chin, taking care to not grab the beard. Head planes, proportions, and ear placement are confirmed during this portion of the exam. Brush the hair away from the eyes to check eye color, shape, placement, and pigmentation. You may then move on to examining the bite and noting nose color. Any disqualifications on the head may be identified at this time.

To check for disqualifying white on the chest, face the same direction as the dog, place your right hand on the left side of the dog’s head as you lean forward to lift the coat on the dog’s chest. Do make sure the dog’s head is controlled by the handler. It is recommended you follow good judging practice as directed by the AKC to avoid placing yourself at risk. Proceed with the examination as with any other breed. Remember to check for coat quality as you examine the body. To examine for length of tail, continue from your exam of the loin and croup, gently place your hand at the base of the tail, then run it down to the bony tip of the tail, verifying that it is uncut. You may then bring the tail over to the hock, taking care not to pull, stretch, or force the crook of the tail open to make your determination of length.

You must be able to confirm that there are two dewclaws on each rear leg. When reaching down to check for dewclaws, do not use the dog’s hindquarters to support yourself, nor should you stoop down or kneel on the ground. To facilitate the examination of the dewclaws, place your hand at ground level at the inside of each rear foot and move it upward. Dewclaws that are attached low on the leg or are positioned next to the other toes may necessitate that you lift the foot to confirm the presence of the dewclaws. If you are unable to locate the dewclaws, give the handler the option of showing them to you. If the handler wishes you to proceed with the exam yourself, carefully lift the leg back and up just a bit, keeping the foot and leg in line with the body.