

The Griffon Bruxellois (also known as Brussels Griffon)

A little bit of history

The Griffon is a small dog that originated in Belgium where it hunted rodents in the stables of Brussels. The original beginnings of the breed are a bit of a mystery and its history prior to the late 1800's remains vague. The breed standard was developed by a committee soon after 1880 with breed classes classified at dog shows in Belgium in 1883. It is thought that an early version of the dog existed in Belgium well before the breed was recognised which was Griffon like in body but which did not have the flat face. Pictures of dogs that resemble Griffons have featured in artworks long before the 19th century. The common day Griffon is thought by some to have evolved by the crossing of Pug's, the Toy Pinscher, Toy King Charles Spaniel's and Affenpinschers, perhaps building upon the earlier version of the breed which already existed. The Pug influence is thought to have provided a significant contribution to the breed as it is now influencing the flat face, large head and eyes, cobby body and wide deep chest.

Breed characteristics

Two types exist, the rough coated Griffon Bruxellois and the smooth coated Petit Brabancon, although both are commonly known under the one name in Australia. Whilst they may look quite different there should be no other difference between these 'types' other than coat texture. Griffons became popular in Britain around the mid 1890's and soon afterwards in the USA. The first Griffon was imported into Australia in 1909.

Griffons are a cobby, well-balanced dog, giving the appearance of measuring the same from withers to tail root as from withers to ground. They are particularly known for their monkey like expression. In body shape the Griffon should appear stout and square not rangy, long legged or long in back. Griffons are not a delicate breed like many others from the toy group of dogs; they should be hardy and compact but not coarse looking.

The Griffon is a dog that loves to be fully involved in life and sharing experiences with its people. They are often described as having an impish sense of humour and being full of character. Griffons do not do well if left alone for long periods of time. Some breeds really cherish their own space but the griffon is not one of these. It prefers to be curled up with its people or another animal so if you're at work all day then consider getting another dog or a cat for company for your Griffon.

Temperament wise Griffon's should be alert, lively and confident, but many do have soft temperaments and they can become shy if handled roughly. In terms of innate temperament however the breed should not be so soft so as to appear to grovel around apologising for its existence. They have a friendly disposition, making friends with all they meet (people and other dogs) and they are extremely adaptable, enjoying walks and games and an active lifestyle, but also are just as happy to enjoy a sedate lifestyle being a loving and devoted companion. For this reason the breed make ideal companions for elderly people.

Coat colour comes in red, black, black and tan. In the USA and in Europe (though not in Britain) the colour Belge (red with black through it) is also permissible. Red is the most popular and most prominent colour. In a clear red a darker shade on mask and ears is desirable. Ideally each hair should be an even red from tip to root. Frosting on muzzles of mature smooth coats is allowable.

Sizes do vary greatly as in its standard it is measured by weight rather than height. The standard states that Griffons should be between 2.2 to 5 kgs and that 3.2 kgs to 4.5 kgs is most desirable.

Until recent legislation banning tail docking came into force here in Australia this was a docked breed, tails carried high, emerging from right angles from a level topline. Undocked the tail should be carried with a gentle sickle curl.

The head of the Griffon appears large in comparison to its body, rounded but not domed. Nose is always black, and as short as possible with large open nostrils, high set, sloping back to the skull with deep stop between nose and skull. They have a wide muzzle, with an underjaw which curve's upwards very slightly. Mouth / jaw should be slightly undershot with even teeth. The lower lip protrudes a wee bit however the teeth (or tongue) should not be visible when the Griffon's mouth is closed. The chin is prominent and with roughs is furnished with a beard. Ears are high set, semi-erect and the smaller the better. Eyes are large and expressive.

Neck should be of medium length, slightly arched; springing from well laid back shoulders. Chest should be rather wide and deep and forelegs straight, of medium length and bone. Griffons should have well muscled thighs of good length, with hocks low to the ground, turning neither in nor out and with stifles well bent. Feet should be small, thick, cat-like with black toenails.

Movement wise this breed should move freely with good drive from the rear. The movement should be true when viewed coming or going. High stepping front movement is undesirable in the breed.

Rough coats are harsh, wiry (though not as wiry as a Wire Fox Terrier), and free from curl and preferably with a thick undercoat. Smooth coats are short, lying close and flat and should not be silky. The rough coated Griffon requires grooming and twice a year it will need its coat either hand stripped (for showing) or perhaps clipped if it's a pet (clipping will change the texture and colour of the coat and therefore is not suitable for any dog that is intended for showing). Smooth coats do not need the same level of coat care as do roughs. In roughs the hair around the eyes grows very quickly and can irritate the eyes if not removed and kept clean. The beard of roughs also can easily become mucky with food and water and dirt and so regular cleaning is recommended.

In some breeds there can be quite noticeable differences in character between males and females however it is generally agreed between Griffon fanciers that there really is not a difference in temperament and personality between the sexes.

Although breeding is not particularly easy, once puppies have been produced and have overcome the first crucial weeks of life, this is in general a healthy breed.

Some Griffons, like many of the short nosed breeds, suffer from snorting, which is caused by elongation of the soft palate. This is rarely a problem.

Because the eyes are fairly large they can be susceptible to damage so it is important that eyes are kept clear of debris and discharge. This can be helped by keeping the area around the eye clear of excess hair and items which might become entangled in the hair around the eyes. If you are not diligent in this area of care eye irritations, possibly resulting in ulcerations of the eye are not uncommon.

The Griffon is a very intelligent dog, very trainable, and many have achieved obedience and agility titles.

As the Griffon is a relatively rare breed most people interested in obtaining one discover that it is not as readily available as many more popular breeds. Griffons generally have small litters and breeding is also difficult as the small puppies are often very susceptible to problems before they reach the age of six weeks.

For these reasons, and because the breed is steadily increasing in popularity, generally people wanting to acquire a Griffon find that they need to place their name on a waiting list with a breeder(s) from whom they would like to purchase a puppy. Resulting puppies from planned litters from respectable breeders will often be already well and truly committed before birth.

As with any breed, dog ownership is a commitment for the duration of that dogs life and should never be entered into lightly, without adequate consideration.

We love this breed and we are always happy to discuss any breed characteristics or requirements such as training, feeding and general care with any prospective or current Griffon owner.



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