

So You Think You Want A Kelpie 😊

The Australian / Working Kelpie - Two distinct lines or types??

You would be hard pressed to find a better-known Australian dog than the Kelpie. This working breed, adapted specifically for Australian conditions has been tending and working sheep throughout the sheep country of Australia, for many decades.

As with any breeds, human intervention and selective breeding has influenced the breed and today it is well recognised that the breed has two distinct lines or types, the show or bench Kelpie and the Working Kelpie. There are even two separate bodies that register purebred dogs, the Australian National Kennel Council (which registers all breeds of show dogs), and the Working Kelpie Council of Australia, formed to ensure the survival of the breed in its original form. Whilst the official name for the breed as recognised by the Australian Kennel Council is Australian Kelpie the term is almost always now only used in reference to the bench (or show) Kelpie.

So is there really a difference? As a starting point, as noted above there are two official registration bodies. It should be noted however that WKC registered dogs are not eligible for full registration with the ANKC and therefore cannot be shown.

There are recognisable differences in the look of the different lines. In general the Australian Kelpie is more likely to be of a whole solid colour and is usually heavier in build. The Working Kelpie is longer in leg and neck, overall is a taller dog and looks lankier whilst still maintaining a look of strength (should never be weedy in appearance). Whilst solid colours are allowable they are more likely to include tan markings.

Is a Working Kelpie suitable as a pet?

There is a popular belief that working lines are not as appropriate as a pet or companion due to their high herding drive, which has largely been bred out of the bench Kelpie. In some other quarters the debate isn't limited to simply working lines, with some sources questioning whether any type of Kelpie, including show lines, should be considered suitable for pet homes if not provided with significant exercise.

Experienced, established breeders of the Working Kelpie have long prized a working dog that not only is a tireless worker, but one that is responsive to commands at all times, and is at all times a relaxed dog which is just as happy at the foot of its master when at rest. With this in mind breeders of the Working Kelpie breed for soundness in both body and mind - reliability in temperament being a primary concern. Stock crazed, or intensely driven, edgy dog's that become fixated, do not make good workers.

The Working Kelpie was developed as, and maintains the abilities of, a dog that could work tirelessly in open paddocks or rough terrain, or close quarters in stock yards, in blistering heat or intense cold, often covering 80 kms a day. Given this heritage and inborn enthusiasm for work how can a Working Kelpie really make a good pet for a suburban home?

As a professional dog trainer of over 25 years I have certainly seen many manic cross-bred or badly bred Kelpies in my time from both show and working lines, which have had far too much drive combined with temperament instability, to live life as an enjoyable family member in many pet homes.

I have though always found immense variation in temperaments between all breeds with whom I have worked due in part to mass breeding practises of puppy farmers or lack of knowledge in some breeders of genetic temperament faults.

Having long held a love of the breed I went about researching breeding lines of both show and working kelpies many years ago. I encountered many working lines, which I found to be loyal and relaxed companions, well suited to a lifestyle as a pet for someone with an active lifestyle, providing that they are integrated into the lives of their owners. Large does of companionship is what a Kelpie requires above all else.

Asryn Kennels owns and trains Working Kelpies, registered with the Working Kelpie Council of Australia. Our dogs come from long lines of quality dogs selected for their innate working ability. But these dogs also are bred with stable reliable temperaments as a primary concern. That does not mean we think that every home is suitable for a Kelpie and we would not sell puppies to anyone who approaches us. Some homes just aren't suited to specific breeds (and this is true for any breed), a good breeder will ensure that a prospective home is well suited to the dog they are hoping to buy. If in doubt about a breed's suitability we suggest you visit dogs at the homes of possible breeders. Good breeders should be happy to make time for you to visit and interact with their dogs and ask questions whether they have puppies available to sell or not.

You do not need lots of acres for your dog to run. This is an important point because even if supplied with hundreds of acres, unless you go with them, they'll just lie near the back door doing exactly the same as they would do in a city environment. In fact as I write this I have two young Kelpies, one only eight months old, lying quietly under my kitchen table because that's where I am. Therefore a big backyard is not as important as you might think. Dogs rarely exercise themselves much in a backyard. Kelpies want to be with you and will be bored if just left alone in the yard all of the time. Being part of your family is far more important to a Kelpies well being. They love to be around people and don't like to be left out of things.

Kelpies are highly intelligent dogs that do need to be stimulated mentally as well as physically. This is why they do so well at obedience and agility. So how does the average family provide the required stimulation to keep a Kelpie happy and establish the sort of bond that makes for a dog that can be a truly loved, valued member of the family?

Well as with any young dog some form of training is advisable. Even if you do not wish to undertake formal obedience competitions, a period of time undertaking obedience lessons at your local club with your young Kelpie will make him/her a joy to be around and a family member that you can take pride in and really enjoy sharing time with.

Obviously it is also a good idea to walk your dog on a regular basis and dogs are a great motivation for a daily walk – ideal for your own health and well-being. Take your dog out with you when you and your family go places. . A great idea is to go for a run in the park or along a beach as a family outing on a weekend. If you drop into the Video store, you can usually clip your dog up somewhere outside. Every time out with you or a member of the family consider if it is suitable for your dog to go along.

Inside or outside dog?

The Kelpie has been bred to be very comfortable sleeping outdoors providing it has some shelter from sun, wind, rain or draughts. So your dog will be happy if taught that when bedtime comes its place is outside.

However, if you want a dog as purely an outside dog (never allowed inside) please ask yourself why it is you want a dog and if your lifestyle one that would allow you to spend enough time with your dog every day if it is limited only to your backyard. If you are someone who spends a lot of time inside, like every weekday night in winter after you have been away at work all day, then the amount of time that you would be spending with an outdoor dog would be minimal.

Teach your Kelpie to lie on its own mat in the living room, whilst your family is watching TV, or sharing other family time together. Your dog will be much happier quietly lying in the same room as you than it would be left alone outside, no matter how big your backyard is.

Breed characteristics

The modern Kelpie is a short coated, prick eared dog who revels in hard going. Established especially for local conditions this is a dog able to muster huge areas under extreme conditions, often having to do without water for hours on end. Derived from a long line of dogs capable of handling thousands of sheep at a time the Kelpie has a highly developed ability to solve problems for itself, and actually prefers to do so. Like the Border Collie, the Kelpie works with a high degree of 'eye' however the Kelpie rarely 'goes flat to the ground' when working, preferring to manage sheep in standing or crouching position.

Whilst usually giving the appearance of confidence, Kelpies actually have sensitive natures and they will not stand for harsh treatment. Forceful treatment can make a Kelpie shy and unresponsive and display avoidance behaviours when around people. Whilst firm training is required, this must be done with positive kind reinforcement.

Whilst predominantly a sheep herding dog, with breeders selecting breeding stock on their specific abilities for sheep working, most of the stronger working lines can also successfully handle beef or dairy cattle.

The general appearance should be that of an active dog of great quality, showing hard muscular condition combined with great suppleness of limb and conveying the capability of untiring work. The Kelpie is extremely alert, eager and highly intelligent, with a mild, tractable disposition and an almost inexhaustible energy, with marked loyalty and devotion.

It has a natural instinct and aptitude in the working of sheep, both in open country and in the yard. Any defect of structure or temperament foreign to a working dog must be regarded as uncharacteristic.

To produce the almost limitless stamina demanded of a working sheepdog in wide-open spaces the Kelpie must be perfectly sound, both in construction and movement.

Movement should be free and tireless and the dog must have the ability to turn suddenly at speed. When trotting the feet tend to come closer together at ground level as speed increases but when the dog comes to rest it stands four square.

The coat is a double coat with a short dense undercoat. The outer coat is close, each hair straight, hard, and lying flat, so that it is rain-resisting.

Coat colours are Black, black and tan, red, red and tan, fawn, chocolate, and smoke blue. Black is the dominant colour, with the tan marking associated with all of the other colours controlled by another inherited factor. Over many years breeding of what are often referred to by working breeders as 'show' or 'bench' kelpies has seen selection of preferred breeding stock concentrating on solid colours, predominantly all black or all red. Many working breeders believe that selection for colour over many years, in preference to sheer working ability, has contributed to a loss in working ability in some strains. Today, most of the best working strains carry a variety of recognised colour factors, including those responsible for the tan markings. Under Working Kelpie Council guidelines natural and efficient working ability is of prime concern, with colour of little importance in selecting breeding stock.

Detailed information on genetics of colours in Kelpies by J & I Groesbeck of Texas USA is available at http://www.hnrworkingkelpies.com/Coat_Colors.html
Clubs and relevant contacts

The Kelpie, is a loyal dog that loves to 'work' and therefore is a dog that loves to be fully involved in life and sharing experiences with its people.

This is an active breed and there are a wide variety of activities that you can share with your dog. Kelpie's excel at Herding, Obedience, Agility and Flyball (details below).

Working Kelpie Council of Australia – Breed specialty club for Australia promoting the development of working lines. <http://www.wkc.org.au>

Dogs SA (Formally South Australian Canine Association) – <http://www.dogssa.com.au/Website/index.php> Controlling body for dog clubs, confirmation shows, obedience and agility trials in South Australia. Ph : 8349 4797 or email info@saca.caninenet.com

Health and Genetic Disorders

Because they are bred to withstand harsh conditions in the Australian bush and hot outback a well-bred Kelpie should be hardy, and robust and not be predisposed to many health problems. Whilst the breed has relatively few hereditary health issues there are a few genetic health problems that the breed can be susceptible to.

Incidences of **Hip Dysplasia (HD)** is on a steady increase in the breed due to a lack of hip testing by breeders in the past and as such hip testing by specialists of prospective breeding stock is now imperative to minimise the impact. HD occurs when the hip socket and the leg ball-joint don't fit together and the surface of each wears against each other. The 'misfit' results in separation between the bones

known as subluxation. This joint instability results not only in joint malfunction but also in arthritic changes in the dogs hip. Because the dog's body is trying to stabilise the joint it grows osteophytes around the joint, resulting in osteoarthritis and a misshapen femoral neck or head. The pain felt by dogs suffering from HD can be extreme. Hip dysplasia is an inherited defect however formation of the joints can also be modified by environmental factors such as over nutrition, excessively rapid growth, and certain traumas during the growth period of the skeleton.

Like many breeds Kelpies can suffer from an eye disease called **Progressive Retinal Atrophy** (PRA). This is a genetic, inherited disease of the retina (the "film" in the camera), which occurs in both eyes simultaneously. The disease is nonpainful, but there is no cure for it. The eyes are genetically programmed to go blind. PRA occurs in most breeds of dogs and can occur in mixed breeds also. Clinical signs vary from the dog first becoming night blind in the early stage of PRA (not able to see in low light surroundings) to the entire visual field in all light levels becoming affected, which is advanced PRA. All dogs with PRA will eventually develop blindness from advanced PRA. Specialist vets can test breeding stock for clinical signs of PRA and affected dogs should not be bred from.

Copies of test results clearing breeding dogs for HD and PRA should be available for viewing for any prospective puppy buyer.

Cerebellar Abiotrophy (CA) also known as Kelpie Ataxia. CA is a lack of specific cells in the cerebellum, a part of the brain. This horrible degenerative brain disease has recently been discovered in the breed and can affect even new born pups. It is a recessive gene that can be carried by dogs that show no signs. There is no treatment for the disease and it can currently only be diagnosed accurately by autopsy. CA, as with other autosomal recessive conditions, will only be evident in those dogs that have 2 copies of the defective gene, one inherited from each parent. Dogs with only one copy of the defective gene will not develop the condition but have the ability to pass on the condition to their offspring. CA in Kelpies is recognisable in the gait and a continuous bobbing of the head in affected dogs and pups. The affect on the Kelpie can be very mild to extreme.

At this stage it is not possible to test for CA, but a study at University of NSW is being undertaken to try to find a genetic marker. Ask any prospective breeder if they are aware of any dogs in their breeding lines who have been diagnosed with this disease.

Coat Care

The Kelpie's coat is short and requires very little coat care. Good nutrition is important to ensure the coat is not dry and brittle and the skin flaky (most good quality dog foods have oils in them for this reason).

SHARING Your Life with a Kelpie – Issues / time & Commitment ☺

According to a variety of research into canine breeding and behaviour approximately 40 to 35% of a dogs ultimate behavioural makeup is genetic and the rest (60 to 65%) is attributed to its upbringing, training, socialisation, nutrition and health care.

Temperament should be extremely important to breeders, with only dogs with good sound temperaments bred from. Breeders should spend a lot of time with puppies in their earliest days giving them the best start in life that they can. Before being placed in new homes puppies should be well socialised with people and other animals in their early weeks of life. Ideally they will have been handled daily and have been gently introduced to a wide range of noises and experiences to help them become a happy, relaxed, outgoing and well adjusted dog throughout adult life.

It is important that socialising of each puppy continues, especially during the early but extremely critical period in its development, as this time will form the basis for all that each dog will become in the future.

The more chances a puppy has to be exposed to new things and experiences the less bothered it will be throughout its life when faced with new or stressful situations. Unsocialised dogs can become shy, fearful, and defensive and can even become aggressive (fear aggression).

As with many breeds it is important that Kelpie owners do have an understanding and appreciation of the basic instincts that drive this breed along with other characteristics that might be seen as problematic by ill informed owners.

I'm sure you have all read and heard the golden rule that a pet is a commitment for the life of that pet. How true this is! But just as important is that you understand the specific commitment you need to make in the initial period, particularly in the first year or so of your pet's life with you. Young dogs require a good deal of your time and energy to enable its role in your family to be one that you can all enjoy. A dog cannot know how to behave in the way you wish it to all by itself; it looks to you for guidance in its behaviour. A well-trained dog is a happy dog, as it is one that knows what is expected of it and who gains pleasure from pleasing you. I can assure you also that if you take the time to train your dog you will also be a much happier owner as well ☺

Exercise & Attention

The Kelpie is an active dog and it does require some exercise to expend this energy, otherwise you risk your dog displaying destructive behaviours. Despite popular belief this need not be a huge amount of exercise, short periods of regular play is adequate. Running around its own yard (no matter how large this yard may be) day and night will not suffice for this is a breed which requires mental stimulation as much as physical exercise and what it really craves is that you spend time sharing your life with it.

Many behavioural problems such as barking, tearing washing from the line and digging stem from boredom.

The real issue for preventing boredom is how you provide opportunities for your dog that stimulate its mind. Some of this will be your spending quality time with your dog (a dog is not an accessory to leave in your backyard alone all day and night), some of it will be taking your dog for walks or on family trips (do try to 'share' your life and its adventures with your newest family member), and some of this will be the things you provide to occupy your dog when it must be without your company.

Many people go overboard and buy huge numbers of toys, which they scatter around their house and yard, and wonder why these lie abandoned after a few days while your dog looks for something else to take its interest.

We advocate the use of a 'toy box' for dog toys. Large numbers of toys are unnecessary but dogs do bore of toys easily after a few days. Give your dog a few toys and after a few days remove these and put them away in their toy box, giving your dog a new set of toys. A few days later these toys are removed and the original toys returned. Your dog will treat these toys, which it has not seen for a few days as new and exciting again. You will still need to introduce new toys at times but they will last a lot longer using this technique.

The pet industry now has huge numbers of 'toys' designed to get your dog thinking while it plays, through being occupied with specific tasks such as home alone tug of war toys (which hang in trees), to the very successful Kong chew toys and treat balls. We have found treat balls particularly helpful for dogs that are by themselves as they make your dog 'work' for its food. With such devices remember to include any food placed in the treat ball within your calculations for the dog's daily food allowance, otherwise you might find it rapidly putting on excess weight. 'Aussie dog' produces a range of toys especially good for stimulating the minds of working breeds left alone during the day whilst owners are at work. We have found these particularly good for breeds such as Kelpies.

The one thing that a Kelpie does require above all else is large doses of companionship. If you do not feel able to devote a significant amount of time to your dog, and to share your life and activities with it the Kelpie may not be the dog for you.

Heat

Although adapted for Australian conditions your dog should always have access to fresh water and shade. (No dog should ever be left out in the sun without access to adequate shade!) Most Kelpies love water so paddling pools or similar which your dog can stand in or play in are fabulous. Kelpies also usually love trips to the beach

De-sexing

All Asryn puppies sold as pets are sold on a neuter agreement, which means that we expect the owners to de-sex their puppy when it reaches the age of six months of age. There is no reason for a pet of any breed to be left entire and there are many reasons why de-sexing is best for you, your dog and for the breed in general.

Despite popular belief a bitch does not have any need to have a litter of pups for its wellbeing, and there are already far too many homeless dogs in shelters and far more puppies available than the market requires. Breeding is not a money making exercise; to breed in a responsible way requires much research, time and expense.

There are also significant health reasons why a dog which is not intended for breeding should be de-sexed as there are a number of very serious health conditions which entire dogs are susceptible to and which you will not have to worry about with a de-sexed animal.

Advantages of spaying females is that you don't have to worry about messy heats, you don't have the problem of howling male 'suitor's' at your windows and fences trying to get to your female, and you eliminate the real risk of pyometra (disease of the uterus) and significantly decrease the risk of incidences of mammary cancer in your dog. For male dogs the advantages of neutering include decreased incidences of wanting to display aggression to other dogs (without changing your dogs personality), decreased tendency to want to roam in search of bitches in season, and decreased incidences of many urogenital diseases.

History of the breed

There are many arguments and myths pertaining to the foundation of the Kelpie breed. Stories abound about crosses of early shorted coated Scottish Collies with foxes in Europe prior to importation to Australia and dingos after arriving in the new country.

Most agree that the breed originated from the intermixing of the progeny of three pairs of 'working collies' imported into Australia by three early landholders. These short haired pricked or semi pricked eared dogs from the border counties of England and Scotland were own as North Country Collies.

The foundation female is believed to have been born of black and tan working collies, eventually came into the possession of Mr. J.D Gleeson who named her Kelpie.

Jack Gleeson was given an all black dog named Moss from a friend (Moss was a descendant of stock imported from Scotland). Kelpie was mated to Moss and whelped a litter of highly successful working dogs and from which a great line of dogs evolved.

Messrs Elliot and Allen of 'Geraldra Station' imported from Scotland a pair of black and tans, Brutus and Jenny. This pair produced a litter, which included black and tans and red pups. Caesar one of the black and tan progeny from this litter was subsequently mated to Gleeson's Kelpie producing a black and tan bitch named Kelpie after her dam and owned by C.T. King. King's Kelpie produced an outstanding performance at the first sheep dog trial conducted at Forbes Show NSW, resulting in the eventual naming of the breed.

Gleeson's Kelpie was mated on numerous occasions to both Caesar and Moss with outstanding results. These pups became much prized after among landowners and were greatly interbred. At first, dogs of these lines were known as 'Kelpie's Pups' by the turn of the century the majority of dogs of 'Kelpie like' appearance were described as Kelpie's regardless of origin.

Whilst it is probably true that subsequently some breeders of sheepdogs did try introducing the Dingo into their strains of Kelpies as far as most historians can ascertain none had any success with regards to working ability and that the Dingo plays no part in the development of the breed as we know it.

The Working Kelpie Council of Australia

The Working Kelpie Council was formed in 1965, although the need for such an organisation had been discussed continuously during the previous decade. Breeding selection for qualities of athletics and working ability in the breed had been deteriorating rapidly amongst many purebred Kelpies. It was felt by many advocates of the breed as a working sheep dog that the reputation of the breed would be irrevocably effected unless something was done to ensure the future of the breed as a working sheepdog for all time.

Formed along the lines of other breed associations the Council operates as a service for the 'man on the land' as well as the breed. From the very beginning emphasis was placed on the need to register and record breeding details and a national stud register was implemented in October 1967. Dogs with four or more generations of proven recorded breeding are eligible for Stud Book registration. The WKC also runs an Associate register, which caters for working dogs with shorter recorded working background. Both registers are quite separate from the Australian National Kennel Council registration, which caters for purebred dogs of all breeds for show or 'bench' purposes.

Last word ☺

As with any breed, dog ownership is a commitment for the duration of that dog's 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 Kelpie owner.



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