



The faithful guardian

Once a vigilant guard of livestock, the fiercely protective Anatolian Shepherd Dog will never leave your side, writes Laura Greaves.

At a glance

Grooming: ★★☆☆

Exercise: ★★☆☆

Size: Large – 28 to 34 inches at the shoulder; up to 75kg

Lifespan: 13-15 years

Cost: From \$1500

Caroline Hager never imagined that a trip to Turkey would spark a lifelong love affair, but it was while visiting the country in 1990 that she fell head over heels for the noble Anatolian Shepherd Dog (ASD). Hager owned her first ASD within three years and hasn't been without at least one by her side in the decades since.

She says their fierce loyalty is what drew her to the breed. "They are calm, quiet and aloof by nature, so not demanding of your attention, but once they have bonded to you they will never leave you," says the breeder from Queensland's Gold Coast.

"They are generally a serious dog and will guard you until death, so you always feel safe when they are near."

Tireless protector

The ASD's protective instinct has been a sought-after quality for close to 6000 years. Believed to have originated in the Anatolia region of central Turkey, the breed was used by nomadic livestock herders to guard their sheep flocks from predators including wolves, bears and even cheetah.

Even today, Anatolian Shepherds are used by the Namibia-based Cheetah Conservation Fund to prevent endangered cheetahs from attacking sheep flocks and being killed by farmers.

Because they were bred to guard rather than hunt or chase, these watchful canines have no prey drive and can live quite happily with cats and other pets. But their desire to protect also means they can be strong-willed and stubborn.

They are highly intelligent and easy to train, but may not always obey their owner — especially if they feel that responding to a command would interfere with their guardian duties.

"They will search instinctively for things to guard and then will usually have the intention of being willing to die defending their charge," Hager explains. "They will act independently to defend you or your property regardless of your commands if they think you're in danger.

"If you win their respect and love, they will lay down their life for you. They can be very hard to re-home as adults as a result of their tendency to only give their love once and to one leader."

It is their imposing appearance as much as their instinctive protectiveness that makes Anatolian Shepherds such successful watchdogs. A large, muscular breed, the ASD has an air of calm majesty.

"If you saw one watching you quietly from a distance, you would instinctively not approach it — such should be their aura," says Hager.

Patience and persistence

With their unique temperament, the ASD is not for everyone; these serious dogs need patient and dedicated owners. "They need firm, consistent handling as a pup with clear, calm leadership. They don't respond well to being trained in an aggressive manner," Hager says.

"They appreciate love and affection and like to be part of their family to guard them. If you intend to keep them in the suburbs, they need plenty of socialisation and long walks.

"Alternatively, if they are to be working dogs, they like to have a flock and be left to do their job. They will instinctively guard, no matter how well you have socialised them."

The ASD has a thick double coat that, perhaps surprisingly, requires only minimal grooming. It sheds slightly all-year-round, dropping more fur with the changing seasons — not ideal for particularly houseproud dog lovers.

"They don't need much brushing or washing and, if they get very muddy, it tends to dry and fall off and they look clean again," she says. "In Turkey they are never brushed, so when they shed their undercoat it just looks like dreadlocks until they fall out in great pieces, like a shedding sheep."

Anatolian Shepherds are a generally healthy and athletic breed. They are largely free of hereditary diseases, although there have been rare cases of hip dysplasia and entropion, where the eyelashes turn inward and rub against the eye surface.

Hager urges careful consideration before taking one of these beautiful and devoted dogs home. "They are not an easy breed to own. Visit different breeders and see their dogs, as they vary considerably in size and coat and it's good to buy what suits your personal taste and temperament needs," she says.

"Find a breeder who is concerned with matching the pup's temperament with your home and who is willing to give after-sale care and advice." 🐾

For more information

For more information about the Anatolian Shepherd Dog or to find a registered breeder, contact your state canine council or breed club via the Australian National Kennel Council website: www.ankc.org.au. In New Zealand, contact the New Zealand Kennel Club via www.nzkc.org.nz