

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PUMI

By Meir Ben-Dror

**T**he ancestral Hungarian herding dog which later became the Puli, appears to have migrated with the Magyars and their livestock from the Ural-Alтай region, between China and the Caspian Sea, to the Carpathian Basin around 800 AD. This dog most likely can be traced back to the herding/guard dogs (Tsang Apso, mistakenly called Tibetan Terriers by Europeans) originating from China and Tibet and were widespread in that region. The ancestral Puli mixed with French and German herding dogs around 300 years ago, as a result of two-way trading of livestock between Hungary with France and Germany. Livestock was then driven on hoof to their destination and naturally the shepherds used their herding dogs to perform the necessary chores around the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Some accidental or perhaps even intended matings between the respective parties' dogs took place as their paths crossed on the roads and markets of Europe. From the German side the contributors to the creation of Pumi were the Pomeranian Schafspudel (Sheep Poodle, still in existence today in small numbers) and the Hütespitz (Herding Spitz) which was considered extinct as of 1935. Both these ancient breeds were known since at least the Middle Ages. The Pumi's name is believed to reflect the origin of its German genetic contributors.

Our present day Pumi (Pumik in plural) is the result of centuries of selection by shepherds. The selection was directed towards performing tasks which were based on the uniqueness of the environment and the livestock in the Carpathian Basin. The Hungarian livestock, such as the Hungarian Grey Cattle and the Racka sheep are very hardy and originally lived off the land in a semi-wild state. Their temperament matched their environment. There were no huge contiguous pastures, but many smaller ones,



Figure 1: Racka Sheep in Hungary. Photo © Levy



Figure 2: Hungarian Grey Cattle. Photo © Levy



Figure 3: The author with Bohemia Vivace Ash CM CDX BN RE HSA's AX MXJ OF CA herding Racka sheep in Hungary. Photo © Jozsef Tari







which were accessible only by narrow roads, through woods, cultivated fields and strip parcels.

There was a need for a fast, spirited, decisive dog, capable of completing a task independently; one who is perfectly capable of assessing the given situation and to make decisions—correctly—because of its strong desire to please. It's not afraid to get close to livestock, but at the same time is absolutely trustworthy not to damage the livestock; a quick learner to the point of seemingly reading its owner's mind. Dogs that didn't fulfill these requirements were mercilessly culled.

In many cases the livestock owners didn't even own pastures, or theirs was too small to sustain all their livestock. Consequently, they had to rent pastures which

could be miles away. They had to drive their livestock every day over narrow roads, strips of land, and if possible, had to avoid causing damage to the adjacent properties. Here the dogs didn't have the opportunity for outruns in wide arcs, because there was no room. Often they had to go ahead between the livestock's feet to their front to turn or to stop the flock. The dog had to be able to protect a cornfield immediately on the side of the road from the flock, specifically it had to "patrol"—move back and forth between the sheep and the cornfield to prevent the animals from going into the crop. As a result, the sheep got accustomed to the fact that when the dog is close, it's working. There was a need for a dog which likes to work close and is not afraid of livestock. The Pumi's tools were barking, quick movement, and an occasional nip if needed. The Pumi also guarded the farm

and alerted its owners when strange people or animals approached.

In the early twentieth century, the Hungarians identified three distinct herding breeds based on phenotype. The Puli was identified first, being prevalent on the eastern Hungarian plains. The Pumi was next; found more in the hilly country of western Hungary; and the Mudi (which carries more of the characteristics of one of its ancestors, Hütespitz) the last, from southern Hungary. The Pumi was considered a regional variation of the Puli and the two names were used interchangeably for centuries.

Dr. Emil Raitsits, a professor at the Hungarian University of Veterinary Medicine, initiated the standardization of Puli and Pumi in the 1910's and 1920's. The Pumi standard was approved by FCI in 1935.

The Pumi's coat is medium long, forming tight corkscrew curls. Pumi's range in colors from black to silver, white, and fawn (fawn), but must be one base color, with possible shading. No bi-color mixtures are allowed. Their pigment should be dark, even in white dogs. The coat consists of 50% soft hair and 50% coarser hair, all the same length. The Pumi needs combing—never brushing—every 2 to 3 weeks and then wetting down to let the coat curl back up. Once curled, the coat can be trimmed to keep it looking neat. The Pumi doesn't shed, but dead hair will come out when being combed. The Pumi's hair is never blown out and fluffed with a hair dryer as that removes the characteristic curls in the coat; it's the bathing that makes it soft.

Pumi's have a moderately angulated front and rear, with the shoulder and upper arm about equal in length. The loin and croup are short, allowing them to power off their rear to turn quickly and sharply. The Pumi has some terrier-like attributes, such as quick, alert, inquisitive temperament, and a square, lean and muscular body type. The average male ranges from 16 to 18½ inches tall and weighs 22 to 33 pounds. The average female is 15 to 17½ inches tall and weighs 18 to 26 pounds.

The Pumi is intelligent, a quick learner and energetic, needing regular exercise and mental stimulation. It's always engaged, sometimes restless with unspent energy. It has boundless willingness to work, but





is not obsessive about it. He can be recklessly bold; yet aloof with strangers.

Its intelligence, liveliness, opinionated and expressive nature always draws attention everywhere. It's a fairly vocal breed. Its entire appearance projects its quickness to act and larger than life attitude. It is a good size for a lap dog, and likes to be petted, but may go and investigate if something else is going on. It also likes to be in high places, to better see and check out what's going on. The Pumi wants to be where the action is, or as close to the center of action as possible. As a full family member the Pumi takes it for granted that it should have reasonable rights and absolute admission to all its "flock's" activities. With daily exercise, the Pumi makes a wonderful house dog. It will bond closely with its entire family, but might prefer one family member as the "boss". Eventful daily life, without long hours of boredom alone is sufficient for most Pumik. Tennis balls and Frisbees are especially important toys and they may be demanding about having them thrown.

The Pumi is a hardy, healthy breed. Although inherited conditions can be found on occasion, none is prevalent in the breed. It is important to screen dogs for hip dysplasia and patellar luxation. Eye tests should be performed annually. DNA tests will show whether the dog carries the genetic markers of Degenerative Myelopathy (DM) and Primary Lens Luxation (PLL).



Figure 4: Bohemia Vivace Ash CM CDX BN RE HSAs AX MXJ OF CA

The Pumi participates in conformation shows in the Miscellaneous Class, and is becoming increasingly popular for agility, obedience and other dog sport and companion events. The contemporary Pumi competes in herding trials, and works on the farm as it is still a good herding dog, provided it is trained by someone familiar with its particular style of herding.

Our task today as Pumi enthusiasts is to utilize these uncommon qualities with some care and preserve them in the breed. ■

#### BIO

*Meir Ben-Dror has been an owner, trainer, exhibitor and breeder of Pumik since 2009 and owned, trained and competed in obedience and agility other breeds since the early 1980's. Herding is now his main activity with his Pumik, leaving agility and obedience for his wife, Nancy. Meir is fluent in Hungarian, enabling him to research the breed from original Hungarian sources. Meir is a board member of the Hungarian Pumi Club of America.*

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