These are three breeds with long histories and heavily corded or matted coats. Breeds with shared ancestry make for sensible comparison, as do those that have the same jobs or similar overall appearances. In this case, our comparison is of three barely related breeds that share an external appearance due to coat matting, flocking or cording. Each breed claims an ancestry in the historical migration of tribes or nomadic herdsmen from Asia into Europe.

**History**

Pulis and Komondors probably came to the Carpathian Basin of Hungary together tending the flocks of a Turkic-speaking people called the Cumans or Kuns. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Cumans migrated out of Asia due to Mongol expansions. The resemblance between the Puli and the Tibetan Terrier suggests some shared history between those breeds in Asia. Because they crossed the Russian Steppes, it is possible that Komondors may share some heritage with the South Russian Sheepdog (or Owtcharka).

In 1239, the Cumans arrived in Hungary, pursued by Mongols, and asked King Bela IV for asylum. They were nomadic, on horseback, and spoke a language similar to the Magyar Hungarians. To King Bela IV, they must have looked like an armed cavalry with a shared enemy (Mongols). After political turmoil involving the new strangers, the Cumans were exiled, and the Mongols captured large parts of Hungary in 1241 and 1242.

When the Mongols withdrew to go home and elect a new chief Khan, King Bela needed to strengthen his defenses for the future. He invited the Cumans back in 1246 and granted them crown lands in central Hungary. There they settled with their flocks and their partnered canine workers: a serious-minded guard dog (the Komondor) and an active and intelligent herding dog (the Puli). This history also answers why there are two large white livestock guarding dogs in Hungary: the Kuvasz was the dog of the Magyars, and the Komondor belonged to a different ethnic group and lived in a somewhat isolated region. (My thanks to Komondor and Puli expert, the late Dr. Arthur Sorkin, for compiling this history.)
Introducing
GCH Nagyalma Betty Boop

Presented by Nina Fetter
Breeder • Owner
Audrey White

Our Appreciation to Judge Mr. James G. Reynolds

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Komondor
The Bergamasco also has an ancient history and is believed to have originated in Persia (now Iran). The breed would have spread into Europe with their nomadic masters and their herds. When some of these nomads eventually settled in the Italian Alps, the homeland of the Bergamasco was established.

A possible relationship between these three breeds comes at that time in the 13th century when the Cumans were politically exiled from the Carpathian Basin and may have drifted into the Alps. Was there mixing with a local herding dog? Perhaps, but Bergamasco experts do not note this possibility in their history.

Both Komondor and Puli populations were decimated during WWII. Komondors were restored using a few dogs that were sheltered in the Budapest Zoo during the war, along with those that survived at work on the Hungarian plains. As recently as the 1980s, some of our Komondors' five-generation pedigrees included unnamed dogs shown as "dog of the plains."

Pulis had grown in popularity in Hungary in the 1930s and enough survived to repopulate the breed through the 1950s. After WWII, industrialization and tourism changed the lifestyle in the Bergamasco's traditional alpine valley home. The dogs moved, with their "traveling shepherds," to tend the flocks of rich landowners in a larger region. Because the shepherds were from the Bergamasco Valleys, the dogs got that name. They had previously also been known as Alpine or Northern Italian Sheepdogs.

Conformation Under the Coat

KOMONDOR. Dogs with jobs adapt body and movement styles and size best suited to that job. Komondors are specialized as flock guards. They defend their flock from wolves, dogs or strangers and work in cooperation with the shepherd. They need to be big enough to be imposing but athletic enough to get the job done. Hence, the most important sentence in the Komondor standard is, "While large size is important, type, character, symmetry, movement and ruggedness are of greatest importance and are on no account to be sacrificed for size alone."

To generate that ruggedness and movement, Komondors are described as slightly rectangular (the Hungarian standard says it is typically zero to 8 percent longer than tall) and with "plenty of bone and substance." Although no ideal size is described (just a minimum of 27.5 inches for dogs, 25.5 inches for bitches), one can argue that a 29-inch dog or a 26-inch bitch is plenty big enough to get the job done. With ideal weights of 100-plus pounds for dogs, 80-plus pounds for bitches, this is not a giant dog in the manner of a Saint Bernard but rather a large, sturdy, agile athlete. Shaved-down dogs, with plenty of size, support that body style.

While not a "head breed," Komondors display good strength in their heads with a broad topskull and strong, wide muzzle. The total length of the head is described as, "approximately two-fifths the height of the dog." That means a 29-inch-tall dog's head is almost a foot long! That head is ideally 40 percent muzzle and 60 percent topskull.

Komondor gait is "light, leisurely and balanced," and dogs should show an athletic, solid topline on the move.

PULI. Pulis are fine-tuned for the strenuous work of tending flocks of Hungarian Racka sheep. The Racka can be headstrong. While the Puli is temperamentally willing to guard, ideally it had a Komondor partner to do the guarding work. So just as the Komondor would rarely have to herd, so the Puli would not need to face down a predator.

The Puli's ideal size is 17 inches for dogs and 16 inches for bitches. Their square and compact build with a short strong loin make for maximum agility and quick stops and starts. One Puli herding technique is to jump up on the backs of the sheep—an acrobatic feat! They are lively and light-footed and can really cover ground in the ring, with good reach and drive.

Under the coat, the Puli is described as square and well angulated (90-degree shoulder) but otherwise moderate and of medium bone. For good legs, Pulis should be about 45 percent depth of chest to 55 percent leg length. Their head is medium broad with the muzzle making up 40 percent of head length.

BERGAMASCO. Bergamascoes serve as both flock guards and herders. They are designed to do their job in mountainous terrain. Their mass is described as "muscular, heavy-boned ... with plenty of substance." At 23.5 inches in height for dogs and 22 inches for bitches, they are about midway in size between the Komondor and the Puli. The Bergamasco standard says dogs weigh between 70 and 84 pounds, bitches between 57 and 71 pounds. This is indeed heavier-boned, by proportion, than either the Komondor or Puli.

The Bergamasco is "about 5 to 6 percent longer than the
Puli and Komondor puppies are never brushed, only bathed. They begin to cord at about 9 months of age. Bergamasco puppies are brushed, however, and their coats begin to form flocks and clumps at about a year old.

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Coats and Colors

Distinctive for their appearance and function, but not as important as body style and construction for getting the job done, are the unique coats of these three breeds. Komondors and Pulis have essentially the same coat and cording style. Bergamasco have a unique mixed coat that forms mats. They will look different from the corded breeds at every age.

Komondor & Puli. Komondors and Pulis are born with wavy coats, which are soft and fall into curls. Fanciers never brush this baby coat; they just bath the dog to keep it clean and let the coat do its thing. At 6 months, when the dogs might first enter the ring, they are not matted or corded, just fluffy, the coat a few inches long, with some curl or crimp. This is what an ungroomed Poodle would look like also, as the coat is essentially the same.

At around 9 months, the soft coat and some guard hairs will begin to entangle in some areas, and the cording will begin. Typically the first places to clump up are on the rump or around the ears. The dog will still look fluffy and unkempt from the outside, but there are clumps forming near the skin, which can be felt and will repel careful groomers of other breeds. Now is the time for the owners to begin to split the forming clumps into even cord sections.

Good cords come from an area about the size of a quarter at the skin. The cords do not clump up right at the skin, so the coat is healthy and open at the skin. Depending on the specific dog's coat texture, the coat might mat up entirely, might form into plates or might go fairly directly into cords. Any of these are OK, and in the hands of an experienced Puli or Komondor groomer, all will look great later. The main activity is splitting the cords down to the skin and bathing, which tightens the cords. Legends of beeswax treatments or hours of twisting are incorrect.

For Komondors and Pulis, the coat remains the same as the dog grows older. Cords just get longer with age. Puli coat reaches the ground at 4 or 5 years, and Komondor coat "turns the corner" and begins to look mature at about age 3 or 4. Still, that coat may fly up over the back on the move. The coat reaches the ground at 5 to 7 years old, depending on the dog's height.

Komondors come in white only and must be corded by 18 months, which is usually not a problem. Komondor puppies often have cream or buff on the ears or elsewhere, and this is fine. Pulis come in white, shades of gray, black and rusty black. The gray or silver coats lighten with age and may have variations in color on different parts of the body. The black coats are usually a little coarser than the white, but all cord just fine. Pulis may be shown brushed but in a good, well-crimped coat, this is a battle against the coat's constant desire to cord up. In other countries, Pulis must be corded. In Hungary another Puli color, fako, or fawn with a dark mask, is allowed.

In 35 years of experience with Komondors and Pulis, I have seen only one coat that I considered faulty (except for the one with a big gray spot). Everyday judges (i.e., not breeder-judges) should concentrate on evaluating the dogs under the coat. As long as the coats are a correct color and have some crimp and curl, they are likely just fine.

Bergamasco. Bergamasco coat is unique. As with the Komondor and Puli, the coat includes fine hair (undercoat) and coarser outer coat. Bergamasco coat also includes "goat hair." It is long, straight and rough in texture, reminiscent of the coarse hair on a Briard. Distribution of the various types of hair over the body is not homogeneous. The withers and head of the Bergamasco have more goat hair, and those areas may be absent of flocks. The rear is woolier and will form mats or cords with maturity.

Development of the final Bergamasco coat occurs in stages. Puppies do not show any tendency to felt or mat. Fanciers do...
Judging Through Heavy Coats

Judges must examine the dogs, in detail, by hand under the coat in order to determine the structure, muscle and bone of these densely coated breeds. On the move, you can only see some clues of the movement, the ones that are not obscured by the coat.

Here is how to do this evaluation: Imagine a Doberman or Rottweiler standing in front of you. Close your eyes. Could you still find the key structural elements (shoulder and rear angles, length of neck and ribcage, amount of bone, proportion, breadth of topperskull and muzzle) of the dog with your hands? Of course. Now send that Doberman around and down and back. Only watch its footfall, reach and drive balance at the feet and topline. Did you find out enough to evaluate its soundness, efficiency and movement style? Of course. This is how the key elements of structure and movement must be evaluated on a heavily coated Komondor, Bergamasco or Puli.

While Komondors and Pulis have essentially the same coat and cording style, the Bergamasco has a unique mixed coat that forms mats.

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brush the coat at this stage. At about 1 year old, the hair changes texture. Wooly hair grows on the tail and withers, and the coarser straighter goat hair grows over the withers and saddle. Shedding and this growth start the formation of flocks and clumps. In this transitional coat, some hand work is done, but excessive bathing or organizing is not recommended. After three years, the adult coat is in place and grows longer with age. It is never as organized as a Komondor or Puli coat because of the variable presence of the goat hair, and wide flocks can be divided if desired.

Bergamasco coat can be solid gray, gradations of gray (including merle) up to and including solid black. Solid black coats may contain less goat hair. In general, the coat lightens or fades with age. At the skin, it will always be black or gray. The coat should always look rustic. White on more than one-fifth of the body disqualifies at any age.

For all three breeds, the coat provides protection from the elements and from predators. For Komondors, part of their guarding routine is to leap up and out, which blows up the coat and must make them seem very imposing to a hostile canine. I bet Bergamascos do the same thing. All three of these breeds, coat appearance changes drastically with age. Coat length and texture should be appreciated for the coat stage of that age. Among adult coats, rewarding coat length in Komondors, Pulis and Bergamascos is just rewarding the dogs for being older. That is not a sensible judging criterion.

Temperament

These breeds are independent, intelligent and self-motivated. Shepherds using both Bergamascos and Pulis needed the dogs to be as independent as possible, taking instruction from their person but also taking action on their own. They worked in strong partnership in the field, and they do the same at home and in the show ring. The guarding task of the Komondor certainly requires independent thinking and action. That being said, these are smart, trainable dogs that should be able to learn the “rules” of the dog show ring.

Finally, remember that when we judge, it is our job to offer breeding recommendations in our evaluation and placements. In heavily coated breeds, we must judge through the coats and see the features that will help the breeds perform their jobs. That will identify the better dogs that deserve titles and to be used in breeding programs. DIR

Eric Liebes, Ph.D., has been a breeder-judge and mentor for Komondors and Pulis for many years. He got his first Komondor in 1981, and that bitch still holds the all-breed Best in Show record for the breed. Eric and his ex-wife, Nancy, bred many champions under the Nagyalma kennel name. Eric is currently approved to judge the Hound, Working and Herding Groups. He lives in Colorado with his wife, Joan.

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