The playful Puli

Ch. Csanyteliki Clgany strikes a regal pose on a mountainside in his native Hungary.

Jumping at the Puli Club of America National Specialty in 1983.

A puppy with a good coat gives the photographer a playful look.

Ch. Csanyteliki Clgany, 2½ years.

A five-month-old Puli receives a good brushing before show time. (all photos by M. Wakeman, DVM)

"Good" Puli coat in a young (one year old) dog. Notice the good cording and texture.

Dogs not bathed before the show at a European event.

"Carbon" and his European medals. Owned by G. Starkbauer, I. Olajos and Dr. Mary Wakeman.

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by Mary C. Wakeman, DVM

The Puli is one of three medium-size Hungarian sheep-herding breeds. The other two are the Pumi and the Mudi. The Pumi looks like the sort of mutt you'd expect from crossing a Puli and some sort of Terrier. The Mudi looks even more like a mutt—one of those generic small black dogs which turn up in every veterinarian's office and whose owners want you to guess what's gone into making him. On a Sunday morning drive through the Hungarian countryside, it's the Pumi and the Mudi you see trotting along behind the herds of milk cows being taken out to graze, or darting off to bunch up a flock of sheep. If you are looking for the more valuable and exotic appearing Puli, your best chance is to take yourself into Budapest, where city dwellers can be found walking their Pulik in areas set aside and marked for the exercising of dogs throughout the city. If you're really lucky, you might come upon one tied outside an Espresso cafe—where his master is enjoying a midmorning pastry (for which the city dwellers can be found walking their dogs). And looking quite ready to walk into an American show ring.

If you know where to look, it would even be possible to find—here in Hungary at the heart and soul of world Puli breeding—Pulik born and bred in the U.S. For years, the pioneering American breeders struggled with the problems imposed by very low numbers of breeding animals. Type was fixed in the early days of the breed in this country by the restricted gene pool and by a standard which reflected what we had, not what was standard for the breed in its homeland. The gradual changeover in this country, back to the authentic Hungarian type, has been marked by bloody battles. But now Pulik breeders in the U.S. have seen landmarks to be proud of. First, as of February, 1983, a revised standard was adopted which is much closer to the FCI international standard, and second, it can truly be said that we now have type as good as any, anywhere. The proof of this second statement is that in 1983 the first bilateral exchange of breeding stock occurred between the United States and Hungary. In the Spring of 1984, a Canadian bred—American-owned Puli went to Budapest and won both the National (CAC) and International (CACIB) "tickets." There can be no better evidence of the success of the efforts of the many who struggled so long and hard to breed Pulik of impeccable type here in the U.S. and in Canada.

The ancient history of the Puli is a reflection in miniature of the migrations of different groups of people through Asia and Eastern Europe. There are those who say that the breed has a history dating back 8,000 years; others claim only about 1,000 years, and a final group would argue that, in one sense, the breed dates to recent post-war years. Probably all of these views contain some element of truth. The first group of researchers make their point citing written references, artwork, and skeletal remains of a herding dog looking exactly like the Puli in several archeological sites in Palestine and the near East, dating as far back as 6,000 B.C. There is wider agreement that the breed dates at least as far back as about 1,000 years ago, when it arrived in Hungary with the Huns. However, during the war years, Hungary was, as so often in its past, the site of great devastation. The three breeds of sheep-herding dogs were reduced in numbers and not always bred carefully under these difficult conditions. The Hungarian breeders needed to make a strong effort to bring order out of what they were left with at the end of World War II. These post-war breeders deserve the highest praise, and have reconstructed for us a breed is nature's way of dealing with a certain unique appearance, but which also has a beauty that allows it to hold its own among the glamour breeds.

Unusual minds

The mind of the Puli is its most important attribute. This is sometimes difficult to convey to people who are making the acquaintance of the breed for the first time, as it's hard to divert their attention from the dog's fantastic appearance. Most Puli breeders take a very "soft sell" approach to people inquiring about the breed, because the striking corded coat and lively bouncing demeanor tend to distract people, to the point of overlooking the breed's strong character. Yet, if you spoke with a breeder, you would find that it's impossible for them to maintain the cool casual approach for long; they tend to lapse into raptures about the privilege of living with these dogs. At this point, they are apt to say, as the Hungarian shepherds always did, "it's not a dog, it's a Puli." Literature on the breed is sparse and is often found by breeders to be lacking in accuracy and insight. Until the most recent editions of the AKC's The Complete Dog Book, the breed was pictured looking like a miniature Briard, or a Beardie. You couldn't possibly recognize today's Puli from the pictures illustrating earlier editions. Even today, misinformation regarding the breed continues to find its way into print. We have recently been told, for instance, that the name of the breed is Pul (true) and its plural is "Pulix" (false). The correct plural of Pul (as used by the AKC) is the Hungarian plural, "Pulik." "K" denotes a plural in Hungarian as a "s" does in English. In addition to Pulik, we have Kuvaszok and Komondorok, plurals for Kuvasz and Komondor. We have been told that the corded coat is a constant chore to start and to maintain. And that too is wrong, or at the very least, greatly exaggerated. A Puli puppy with desirable coat characteristics will display incipient cords as a very young puppy. There will be noticeable, distinct tufts of hair in the puppy coat which are the precursors of the divisions the cords will follow in the adult. With a coat of this quality, one never needs a grooming tool other than a pair of scissors to trim around the feet. As this puppy coat gives way to adult coat, more undercoat comes in; the undercoat is then packed into the center of the developing cord by the surrounding guard hairs of each tuft. As the puppy approaches a year of age, one begins to work through the coat every week or so separating the clumps of hair with the fingers, for a period of three to four months, by which time the cords are set for life. By a year and a half, the dog has a permanent coat which sheds very little and stays very clean (considering the amount of hair involved). The cords, by their own weight and movement, will maintain their separations with little additional attention. The corded coat is nature's way of dealing with a non-shedding coat. With the exception of the Old English, most of the several non-shedding European breeds (including the Poodles) form cords. Cords enable air to circulate at the skin, and avoid matting with painful pulling and the possibility of skin infections underneath.

In the U.S. it is still permissible to show the Puli brushed. The FCI, Canadian and English standards permit only the corded coat, as with the

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The Puli (Continued from page 11)

Komondor, which shares the distinctive coat form of its smaller compatriot. The U.S. and Canada also differ from the European (FCI) countries and England in not allowing the "fako" (cream/apricot) color. The fako (which translates as "bleached or faded out") is shown in Hungary in its own color class, as are the white, the grey, and the black dogs. Although all four colors occur in the breed, black or slate grey. And the black dogs. Although all four colors occur in the breed, black or slate grey. Color patterns are also universally disallowed.

The Puli is a medium size dog ranging from about 25 to 30 pounds, and averaging 16 to 17 inches at the withers. It is a compact, square dog, and appears much larger than it is due to its tremendous coat. A very heavy coated Puli may measure 15 in. wide across the back, with the dog underneath amounting to only about 5 in. or 6 in. of that total. This coat, in uniform slender cords, swirling and moving about the extremely athletic and agile dog underneath, presents a sight to behold. A beautifully-moving adult Champion in cords-to-the-ground will appear to glide around the show ring about an inch above the floor. (That picture has been likened to the movement of those air-cushion lawn mowers at work.) However, when not presented in a show situation, the Puli rarely glides; it charges, hurries, twists and turns. It banks off furniture, guests, and whatever presents itself. No Puli will walk on the ground when it is almost as though the dog is being bounced up and down from the ground. The Puli as a herder is not a dog which uses 'eye' and "mouth" and 'voice', though, barking heels barking furiously and charging around like a black tornado! He is willing to consider you a full partner in your relationship, as long as you prove yourself to him and show that you can be taught the lessons he has to impart. He is manipulative in the extreme, and becomes angry when you remove yourself from his jurisdiction. He's responsible for supervising you at your tasks and has the job of seeing to it that they are properly done. This is not, may I say, the breed for people who like Golden Retrievers. Puli are among the most intelligent of dogs—the legacy of their hundreds of years in a one-on-one working relationship with their human. This unique mind shows at every step of the way. Don't get a Puli if you enjoy being the boss. Most people in "the breed" relish the sassy comments, supreme confidence, and lack of subtlety in these animals. Perhaps the key word in understanding the Puli personality is "frustration." It is impossible for this dog ever to say enough or do enough to satisfy its vigorous nature. It's a physical and mental giant trapped inside a 16 in. body without the power of speech. The earliest of Puli registrations with the AKC were in the mid-30's. Some were obtained for the USDA Experiment Station in Beltsville, MD, which was evaluating sheep dogs. There, on tests which saw the average intelligent dog score 16, the Puli made scores of 75. A dog of this sort may be too intelligent and independent for many. On the other hand, if he's right for you, well, you'll never go back to "dogs." The approach to obedience training a Golden Retriever is likely to get you into hot water with your Puli. He's quite likely to benefit as much from a 10-minute lesson once a week as an hour-long weekly session and daily practices. If you haven't noticed when he's already learned what it's all about, he's likely to end the lesson on his own. He can become very irritated with you if you don't show perception in dealing with him. Most of them seem to learn best if treated like children.
was a dirty mop. Some corded dogs were shown smelling horrible and obviously dirty. The dog show judges will still tell you about it, if you give them the chance. Great battles were fought over the transformation of the breed’s appearance. Today, breed devotees who show in corded coat, by and large, show it as squeaky-clean as those who show the brushed coat—or those who show any other long-coated breed. The corded Puli is no harder to keep clean than a dog which is not corded. It simply takes giving a bath. Perhaps it was some kind of transfer from the European style shows, where grooming is considered less important, which prompted some exhibitors of corded dogs to take them to shows dirty. Or perhaps they were simply people who did not sufficiently care about what opinion people formed about their dogs. One thing, however, remains true; the corded Puli, once it reaches 2½ or 3 years of age, if it does not have its cords trimmed short, will need to be dried under a dryer if he is to smell sweet. As we all know, the washcloth in the bathroom begins to sour, too, if the environment is humid and it doesn’t dry out quickly enough. On the other hand, since the number of cords is a fraction of the number of individual hairs in an uncorded coat, it obviously picks up less dirt. Any coated dog gets dirty and needs an occasional bath, but common sense husbandry is all that’s needed. Breeders will gladly discuss options in grooming style and length of coat—whether brushed or corded. Many brood bitches are kept in cords four inches to five inches long, to provide the ease-of-care and skin-health advantages of cords, without having them so long that they drag in puddles. Others keep their pets or non-showing stock clipped down and brushed, like a Poodle. Breeders will be happy to help new owners with the “how-to” of corded; the process has been presented as such a mystical and difficult art that many would-be Puli buyers give up before they start. The effort in the short term in corded a puppy’s coat will more than repay itself in ease of long-term maintenance, and in the incredible “starring attraction” you will have bouncing along at the end of your leash.

Some owners of the older coat-style Puli, when looking for a new puppy, contact breeders of Tibetans or Bear-bears, after hearing about the differences in Puli coats between then and now. On considering their options, though, they soon come to realize that the Puli is the dog which ran their routines, had been milked and were out to pasture. You recall the series of popular books by British veterinarian James Herriot. But isn’t the type of rural animal practice he made famous a thing of the past?

Yet, Gary continues on: “In search