

The Schipperke originated in Belgium where written history shows they were exhibited as early as 1690. The origin of the breed is unknown, but one theory is that it evolved from the same ancestor as the Belgian Sheepdogs. Since many Belgians know them as “Spitzke” or “Spitz,” some believe that they have a common background with the other spitz breeds. In Belgium they rode the river barges where they were watchdogs and ratters, hence their name “Schipperke” which is probably from the Flemish word “schip” meaning boat. Thus they were nicknamed “Little Captain.” In Belgium they were also the companions and house dogs of businessmen and tradesmen.

Schipperkes were recognized by the American Kennel Club in the early 1900s. In the United States, they are a black breed without a tail. They have natural erect ears, dark brown eyes, and a mischievous but not mean look, which fits their personality perfectly. As adults, the males measure 11 - 13 inches at the shoulders and the females 10 - 12 inches. This equates to a 10 - 16 pound bundle of enthusiastic, joyful and willful dog.

Distinguishing Characteristics

The Schipperke is easily recognized by its unique coat pattern and personality. The adult coat should be short on the face and legs. It should be moderate in length on the body except for the ruff on the back of the neck, the cape around the neck, the jabot that extends down between the front legs, and the culottes on the rear, which are all longer. The undercoat should be dense and the guard hairs slightly harsh to the touch.

The Schipperke character is that of a little watchdog, which makes them very effective early warning systems. They can be enthusiastic barkers if not taught differently. They are extremely active, agile and always interested in what is going on around them. While they love a large yard in which to run and play, they do make excellent apartment dogs if given sufficient exercise. They definitely need to be taught not to dash out doors and to come when called.

Did My Dog Really Do That?

If it is a Schipperke, the answer probably is yes! If this is your first Schipperke you might be discovering some things about your new companion that surprise you. Yes, Schipperkes have a tendency to bolt outdoors, can be hard to housebreak, like to bark, and are very independent and willful little dogs. They are also very intelligent. They like to be with you and “help” you do everything. In short, they definitely need obedience training as a well-trained Schipperke has a happy owner.

Training

In order to become good canine citizens, Schipperkes need training and socializing as puppies. They need to be out among people of all ages on a regular basis as youngsters. When introduced to children early they are excellent with toddlers. It is usually recommended that Schipperke puppies attend a puppy kindergarten class or an early obedience training class. Basic obedience training will not only establish a special bond between a Schipperke and its owner but will also give the control needed. Schips absolutely need to be trained to come as early as possible due to their tendency to go exploring. Due to their independent nature, Schipperkes can be a challenge to train. With persistent and patient owners, they can learn almost anything and can

excel in both obedience and agility. Some also do quite well at herding and others have a well-developed prey drive.

Care

Taking care of a Schipperke is relatively easy. They have a coat that tends to repel dirt and needs minimal grooming - a light brushing once or twice a week and an occasional bath should be all that your Schip needs. They do shed profusely once or twice a year. Many people have found monthly nail grinding works well as many Schips do not like to have their nails trimmed.

Health

Schipperkes have a number of health concerns of which owners and breeders should be aware. MPSIIIB is a newly recognized fatal disease that usually shows up by 2-4 years of age as balance problems. Information about tests for this disease can be found on the Schipperke Club of America Web site at <http://www.schipperkeclubofamerica.org/>. All breeders should have their breeding stock tested to identify carriers and help them make appropriate breeding decisions in order to eliminate the disease.

Other problems that occasionally occur in Schipperkes include luxating patellas (slipping knee caps), LeggPerthes (hip problems), eye problems, including hereditary cataracts, and thyroid problems, which often lead to skin and allergy problems. There are screening tests available for all of these conditions and breeders should be testing their breeding stock.

Epilepsy is another health concern found in Schipperkes. There currently is no test available for epilepsy, but the University of Missouri in conjunction with the AKC Canine Health Foundation is investigating this problem in many breeds, including the Schipperke. See <http://www.canine-epilepsy.net/cerc.html> for more information.

Breeding

Any person not willing to research pedigrees, be knowledgeable about the health of their dog's ancestors, and have their individual dogs tested for the health problems that exist in the breed, should have their pet Schipperkes neutered. Before attempting to breed, they should have a basic understanding of genetics and a thorough knowledge of the breed standard. Breeding is a serious responsibility and all newcomers need to have a breeder that will work with them, be a source of advice, and be their mentor.

Many Schipperke owners and club members participate in the Canine Health Information Center (also known as CHIC) program. This is a centralized canine health database jointly sponsored by the AKC/Canine Health Foundation (AKC/CHF) and the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). The mission statement says CHIC is "to provide a source of health information for owners, breeders, and scientists, that will assist in breeding healthy dogs." The Web site at <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/> states minimal testing for Schipperkes should include a complete thyroid panel, including autoantibodies, eye exams by a veterinary ophthalmologist (CERF), and patella luxation checks. MPS IIIB testing is also a must. Hip x-rays evaluated by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals at <http://www.offa.org/> for Legg-Calves-Perthes and/or hip dysplasia are strongly recommended.

Participation in AKC Events

Schipperkes are eligible to participate in the five following AKC competitions:

- Conformation (evaluation of structure and movement as defined in the standard)
- Agility (jumping, doing tunnels, the dog walk, teeter, weave polls, A-Frame and other equipment)
- Obedience (obeying commands such as heel, sit, down, stay, retrieve, and jump in a formal fashion)
- Tracking (following the scent left by a person)
- Rally (informal obedience)

