

LEARNING MADE EASY



German Shepherds

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Choose the right
German Shepherd for you

Housebreak, train, and
socialize your new puppy

Handle common
behavioral problems

D. Caroline Coile, PhD

Award-winning dog writer



German Shepherds

by D. Caroline Coile, PhD

**for
dummies[®]**
A Wiley Brand

German Shepherds For Dummies®

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Introduction

Everybody thinks that they know the German Shepherd Dog (commonly referred to as the German Shepherd). Many of us grew up with Rin Tin Tin, or we saw German Shepherds in nightly news reports breaking up riots, or we saw them in neighbors' backyards protecting children. But that only scratches the surface of one of the most fascinating and confusing breeds on Earth. And if you're thinking of adding a German Shepherd to your family, or you already have one, you need to know this breed in depth.

It takes only a little investigation to discover that the German Shepherd is a complex breed. All you need to do is flip through the ads of a dog magazine to be inundated with terms and abbreviations like Grand Victrix, SV, VA, and *Bundesleistungshueten*. It's hard to know whether you're buying a dog with a sought-after title or a dreaded disease! And although health-conscious conversations among owners of most other breeds might center around flea control and worming schedules, German Shepherd owners throw around terms such as *degenerative myelopathy*, *pannus*, and *perianal fistula*. Breeding decisions in other breeds may be based on coat color or length; in German Shepherds, a breeder must be ready to recite an OFA number or a PennHip rating. In most breeds, the biggest training decisions that owners face is whether they want to use a choke or a buckle collar; in German Shepherds, it's whether you want to include Schutzhund or search-and-rescue. Whether it's selection, nutrition, routine health care, training, competing, or just having fun, there's more to it with a German Shepherd than with other breeds. That's because there's more to German Shepherds in general.

Can you own a German Shepherd and remain oblivious to its finer points and intricacies? Sure. But why would you want to miss out?

This book explains not only the basics of the German Shepherd, but also the details that make this breed unique. Even if your shelves are lined with dog books, I wrote this book to be the one book you wear out. It's not a generic dog care book, but instead a German Shepherd Dog care book. It's not filled with unrealistic scare tactics about dog care or with hand-me-down dog lore that has no basis in fact. It's filled with breed-specific information that can help you get the most out of life with a new best friend.

About This Book

This book is a reference book, not a textbook; you're not required to read it from cover to cover to get the information you need. You choose how to read it — go to the table of contents and select an individual chapter that interests you, go to the index to find information about a specific problem you and your dog are having, or curl up in front of the fireplace with your Shepherd and read it from beginning to end if you like. The point is to *empower* you to be a good dog owner, not to lecture you or guilt you into doing so.

How This Book Is Organized

I want you to be able to find what you're looking for quickly and easily, especially if you're in an emergency situation, so I've organized this book as logically as possible. Here's a rundown of what you'll find in each part of the book.

Part 1: Getting to Know German Shepherds

Of course I think that the German Shepherd is among the best breeds out there, but I want to convince you of that as well. This part traces the breed's origins so that you can come to appreciate the tremendous care that went into the development of the German Shepherd. Here you can familiarize yourself with the essentials of the German Shepherd physique and mystique, and also do some soul searching to decide whether you are right for this breed.

Part 2: Finding the German Shepherd for You

Once you've decided that the German Shepherd is the breed for you, make sure that you get the best dog for you. This part warns you about the red flags and rip-offs and steers you toward the reliable sources of good-quality dogs. And when you're facing a litter of adorable pups, you can find advice on choosing the one who best matches your lifestyle and your expectations.

Part 3: Bringing Up Baby

This part of the book deals with everyday life with a German Shepherd, and life with a German Shepherd every day. Here you can find tips to get yourself and your new dog through those difficult first days, hopefully saving your sanity, your

carpets, and maybe even your pup's life. I also give you advice on what stuff you really need to buy for your dog and what you can do without, from toys to foods to grooming tools.

Without training, even the best dogs aren't likely to be very well behaved. That's why this part also gives you information about the latest training methods. Nonetheless, no matter how good a job you do, your dog is bound to develop a few bothersome behaviors — look here for the best ways of dealing with them.

Part 4: Keeping Your Dog Healthy

Trying to decide what's normal, what's abnormal, and what's an emergency in an animal with a body so different from your own is a little scary at first — especially when that animal can't even tell you where it hurts. Few dogs make it through life without getting sick or injured. You're the front line of defense when it comes to your dog's health, so this part supplies you with formidable ammunition. I explain how to find and work with a good veterinarian and also tell you about the special needs that an older dog has.

Part 5: Having Fun with Your German Shepherd

German Shepherds are smart — channeling their intelligence into productive activities is critical for this breed. In case you can't think of productive activities for a dog, this part includes enough ideas to keep you exhausted. Your Adonis can strut in the show ring, your Einstein can shine in the obedience ring, your Carl Lewis can run marathons with you, or your Mother Theresa can assist people in need — you can find an activity for just about every German Shepherd!

Part 6: The Part of Tens

Every *For Dummies* book includes a Part of Tens — quick and easy chapters that list ten points on various topics. In this book's Part of Tens, you can find ten tips on traveling safely with your dog and ten fun games to play with your GSD.

Appendixes

Dog fanciers toss around a lot of lingo that may be Greek to you — that's why I've included a complete glossary that covers dog parts, dog maladies, and more. I also list resources for more information about GSDs and the complete AKC breed standard. Finally, if you're interested in showing your dog, look to the appendixes for information about titles, awards, and rankings.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you navigate your way through this book and to highlight important information, I've placed icons next to certain paragraphs. Following are the icons and what they mean:



TIP

This icon points out ways to do something easier, faster, or better.



REMEMBER

This icon draws your attention to information that's worth remembering or referencing again.



WARNING

This icon highlights dangers to your dog's health or well-being.



DUMMIES
APPROVED

This icon marks products or services that earn “two paws up” for their usefulness.

Where to Go from Here

You can use this book in many different ways. If you don't have a German Shepherd yet but want to find out what the breed is like, start with Part 1. If you want to know what you need to do to get the very best GSD out there (as if they're not all wonderful!), turn to Part 2. If you're already the proud owner of a Shepherd, simply find the information that applies to your situation today, whether you need to begin training, want to bone up on doggy nutrition, or want to show off how great your dog is by entering him in conformation shows. Whatever you do, please use this book to make your German Shepherd's life — and thus your own — happier and healthier.

1

Getting to Know German Shepherds

IN THIS PART . . .

The German Shepherd enjoys a universal admiration that few other breeds share. This hero worship is not undeserved; no breed of dog has helped so many people in so many ways. It's only natural that many families considering a new dog think of adding a German Shepherd to the family. But adding even such an intelligent and noble animal to your household is not without pitfalls, and hard though it may be to believe, the German Shepherd is not for everyone. Make sure that you know what you're getting into before you take the plunge into German Shepherd guardianship.

The chapters in this part introduce you to the German Shepherd, give you insights into its reason for being, and trace the story of how these dogs came to be like they are today.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Deciding whether you're ready for any dog, much less a German Shepherd
- » Understanding the time, energy, and money involved in dog ownership
- » Looking at the pitfalls of living with a big, smart, active dog

Chapter 1

Making the Decision of a Lifetime

Whoever said, “You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family,” obviously never picked out a dog. With a dog, you can choose both your friend *and* your family!

Despite this great opportunity, most people devote about as much time to choosing a new dog as they do to ordering lunch from a drive-thru window. Not surprisingly, in the United States, even more people divorce their dogs than their spouses. The problem is, unlike divorcees, spurned dogs don’t end up in singles bars — they end up in animal shelters. For most of them, it’s a one-way trip. So my first mission in this section is to talk you out of getting a dog and to try even harder to talk you out of getting a German Shepherd. If you’re still not convinced that this is the mistake of a lifetime, you just might be ready to choose the friend of a lifetime.

The first point to consider is whether you’re ready to care for *any* type of dog. Take this quiz to help you assess your dog-readiness:

- » Can you share several hours a day with a dog?
- » Can you devote at least one hour each day to exercising a dog?
- » Can you devote at least 30 minutes each day to training a dog?

- » Can you feed a dog on a regular schedule?
- » Can you provide safe and comfortable sleeping and living accommodations for a dog?
- » Can you afford the food and veterinary bills for a dog?
- » Can you keep a dog for his entire life?

Obviously, you're supposed to answer "yes" to each of these questions. If you did, great! Before heading out to get a dog, however, you need to think about the specifics of dog ownership. The following sections walk you through each major component of owning a dog in general, and a German Shepherd Dog in particular.

Sharing Your Time

Can you picture yourself in this scenario?

You're late to work again, so you push the dog outside, hustle the kids out the door, and spend a grueling day making a buck. You come home dead tired but determined to spend quality time with your kids. The dog keeps butting in and dancing on top of the Monopoly board on the floor, so back outside he goes. A little while later, your dinner guests arrive, and the dog is sniffing them in embarrassing places — how'd he get back inside, anyway? After the guests are gone, you remember that it's time to feed the dog (patting yourself on the back for being such a responsible dog owner). You go in the yard to fetch the dog and fall into a hole, angrily noticing that all the plants have been dug up.

Is that dog incorrigible? No, that dog is neglected. A dog is an active, intelligent animal who can't be subjected to a life sentence in solitary confinement. Nor is he a toy that you can put away until you feel like playing with it again, or breathing furniture that's there to provide an all-American backdrop for your family picture. If you plan to get a family dog, you must treat him as a member of the family.



REMEMBER

A German Shepherd in particular is smarter than the average dog. He needs companionship and activity — even more than most other breeds do. You don't have to quit your job to get a German Shepherd, but you do have to make time for your dog just as though he were a second job, with no time off.

Exercising

For some perverse reason, dogs love to exercise. This trait is incredibly irritating to many dog owners (although a major appeal to the health-crazed minority). German Shepherds *really* love to exercise. They were bred to cover miles of territory every day and to keep on the move for hours. A stroll around the block is not going to cut it.

You have a few choices if you decide to bring a GSD into your family:

- » You can buy 20 acres of land and fence it securely so that your Shepherd can patrol the perimeter.
- » You can buy a doggy treadmill and run up your electric bill.
- » You can get up off the couch and become healthy yourself. Walk, or even jog, your dog a couple of miles every day.



TIP

You can cheat by shortening the walk but adding a play session. This way, you get to stand relatively still while throwing sticks and balls that your dog can retrieve. (For more on playing and exercising with your dog, see Chapters 15 and 19.)

If physical exertion is out of the question for you, strongly reconsider getting a German Shepherd.

Training

Most people think that they want canny canines, but very few people are prepared to deal with and nurture that intelligence. An intelligent child who is given no direction or stimulation is on the way to becoming a problem child; the same is true for an intelligent dog. If you plan to keep your dog in a cage for a good part of the day, or locked in the house alone while you work, you don't want a dog whose mind is racing with ideas and who needs entertainment. A dog can't read a book or watch TV when things are slow — he needs activities to do. A smart dog will look for ways to entertain himself, and he will find them.

The problem is that even the most intelligent dog is not smart enough to think of helpful things to do for entertainment. True, he may decide to redecorate your house, but chances are that ripped drapes and chewed paneling are not your thing.

A bored dog will dig, bark, get into the garbage, and chew. Then what happens? His owner tries to remove all the items with which the dog could entertain himself or locks the dog in a cage or run.

A dog will always find a way to do something, even if it's only barking or biting himself — and when he finally gets a chance to do something, he will be so crazed with relief and ecstasy that his owners may consider him uncontrollable. They conclude that this supposedly intelligent dog is actually stupid and wild and take him on a one-way trip to the dog pound.

You need to exercise your German Shepherd's mind as well as its body. Training your dog not only tires out his little brain but, he being a German Shepherd, actually results in learning on the dog's part! You have in your power the ability to create a being (perhaps the only one in the world) who will pay attention to what you say and even mind you.



REMEMBER

For some breeds, training is a nice option; for German Shepherds, it is a necessity. They are too smart, too powerful, and too active to remain without a leader. If you don't plan to lead, get out of their way, because the dogs will gladly take over. And although GSDs may be smart for dogs, they really aren't leadership material.

Despite (or perhaps because of) their being the near equivalent of canine Einsteins, German Shepherds require you to have plenty of patience. Can you calmly say, "Now give me my wallet — oh, I see you've eaten a \$50 bill" and then walk away without contemplating murder? Can you return to your car to find your dog's face poking up from a sea of upholstery foam and simply get in and sit on the springs for the drive home? German Shepherds are ingenious, and like gifted children they're prone to occasional experimentation. If you're thinking of owning a GSD, keep this inevitability in mind.

Calculating the Cost of Loving Index

"All you add is love," the ads claim — and a lot of work and a mound of money. Dogs are the best love money can buy, but they don't come cheap. Besides the initial cost of a German Shepherd (which can range from \$100 to \$10,000), you need to feed the dog, house the dog, and fix the dog — not to mention all the fun stuff you can spend money on, such as toys, accessories, classes, and competitions, and all the not-fun stuff, such as replacing your carpets, doors, and plants.

Use the following expense calculator to estimate the cost of dog ownership.

One-Time Expenses

Dog:	_____
Puppy vaccinations:	_____
Fence:	_____
Cage:	_____
Bedding:	_____
Collar and tags:	_____
Leash:	_____
Grooming tools:	_____
First-aid kit:	_____
Neuter/spay:	_____
Toys:	_____
<i>Total one-time expenses:</i>	_____

Yearly Expenses

Food:	_____
Checkup/vaccinations:	_____
Heartworm preventive:	_____
More toys:	_____
<i>Total yearly expenses:</i>	_____

When-You-Least-Expect-It Expenses

Replace carpeting:	_____
Replace interior of car:	_____
Emergency trip to vet to remove carpeting and auto upholstery from the dog's stomach:	_____
<i>Total when-you-least-expect-it expenses:</i>	_____

Optional Expenses

Classes: _____
More classes: _____
New home with a bigger yard: _____
Total optional expenses: _____

Grand Estimated Total Over the Next 12 Years:

Were you shocked at that 12-year total? You're not alone. But remember that you get what you give. Owning a dog brings you many benefits, including the possibility of a longer life!

You may think that you can scrimp a little on some of these things, but you can't scrimp on the most important things: feeding, housing, and caring for your dog.

Feeding the dog

Dogs not only like to eat, but they *have* to eat. German Shepherds are good-sized dogs who need to eat 3 to 6 cups of food each day. Feeding a dog does not require the combined efforts of the great chefs of Europe, but it does require consistency and an outlay of money to buy a decent-quality food. You can't just throw your leftovers in a vat and slop the dog, or you will spend all the money you think you're saving at the vet's office. A typical food bill for an adult GSD is \$300 to \$500 per year.



WARNING

Some dog owners think that if they have to stay late at work or even spend the night away from home, the dog can just go without. This approach is not right, and it's not healthy. Then there's the child who promises to feed the dog but fails to keep the promise. Too often, the parents resolve to teach the child a lesson by not giving in and feeding the dog. Huh? A dog needs nourishment just like you do, and neglecting to feed him is cruel.

For information about what to feed, how much to feed, and how often to feed a German Shepherd, see Chapter 7.

Housing the dog

Where will your new family member live? In the basement? The garage? A pen? What a lovely welcome! You can modify these places to serve as temporary

quarters, but if you want your German Shepherd to be a part of your family, you must make some compromises so that he can share your household. Some people who want their dogs to function as guard dogs reason that sleeping inside will spoil them for their duties, but you'll find that your dog is far more likely to guard his family if he actually knows who his family is.

This doesn't mean that you have to give your dog the run of the house and first rights to all your furniture, however. A dog needs his own place, so wherever you want your dog to sleep, make him a special spot all his own, complete with soft bedding. A cage (or "crate") fulfills this role; I suggest that you purchase one. See Chapter 5 for what to look for in a good cage.

If you plan for your dog to spend a good deal of his time outside, you must provide a warm shelter for winter, shade for summer, and a fence year-round. A German Shepherd's intelligence is both his greatest asset and perhaps his greatest undoing. Owners convinced of their dog's high IQ figure that Rin Tin Tin is too smart to need supervision and allow him to roam at will. The smartest dog is nonetheless dumb by (most) human standards, and a loose dog is likely to be a dead dog eventually.

Keep in mind too that, like all dogs, German Shepherds shed. In fact, German Shepherds shed a lot. If you can't tolerate hair in any part of your home, a GSD is *not* the dog for you. Also consider that GSDs are large dogs. If you live in tight quarters, adding a dog to step over every time you cross the room may not be a good idea.

Fixing the dog and keeping him healthy

Your German Shepherd will have to go the veterinarian, and although vets may be nice folks, they don't work for free. Your dog will need vaccinations, worming, neutering, and heartworm checks and preventives. Add a couple of visits for when your dog is puking on your couch and other assorted pleasantries, and you have a normal year's vet expenses of about \$150 to \$400.



REMEMBER

As with people, the threat of catastrophic illness looms. German Shepherds are predisposed to several serious health problems, including hip and elbow dysplasia, osteochondrodysplasia, cauda equina, gastric torsion, and perianal fistulas, all of which can be very expensive to treat (see Chapter 12 for details). Cancer, trauma, and all sorts of weird ailments can cost thousands of dollars to treat as well. Chances are they won't happen, and you can't be expected to spend your children's college fund on your dog, but be aware of the possibility of such a problem. Veterinary bills are usually highest in the first and last years of a dog's life.

Having a Friend of a Lifetime for a Lifetime

How does a dog fit into your long-term plans? Do you know where you'll be living a year from now? Can you say with assurance that you'll live somewhere that allows you to have a dog and that you will not allow your circumstances to change to the point where you can no longer keep a dog? If you add a baby to the household, does the dog go?

Plan on having your Shepherd for the next 12 years or so and on caring for him every single day of those 12 years. Shepherds make great dogs in part because of their loyalty to their families. Don't get a Shepherd on a trial-run basis. They are sentient beings who do not understand why they have been banished to the backyard or abandoned to a dog shelter. After you use up your dog's irresistibly cute puppy months, few people will line up to offer him a new home. If the old standby line "We found him a home in the country" were true, country roads would be impassable with the millions of these former city-slicker dogs. That home in the country was most likely the city pound, and most dogs don't leave there alive.

The number-one pet problem is lack of responsibility and commitment. The human half is always the unfaithful one — your dog will remain loyal to you no matter how big a jerk you are. Can you be as responsible as your dog? Before you get a dog, can you vow to care for him "in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, 'til death do us part?"

Now's the time to sit down for a serious reality check with your entire family. If your reality check bounces, fish make great pets!

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding how one man shaped a breed
- » From shepherd to police dog to war dog to actor: Evolving the breed
- » Reviewing the AKC German Shepherd Dog standard of perfection
- » Knowing which traits disqualify a dog
- » Admiring a GSD's most noble character

Chapter 2

Setting the Standard for the Breed

Dog fanciers know that having a defined standard for each breed is vital to the breed's success. The folks who control that standard, and thus the breed, work to eliminate or reduce health problems, develop a sound temperament in the dogs, and so on. This chapter explains how the German Shepherd Dog came into being and was developed into the dog that we know and love today — the most incredibly versatile breed ever known. To understand this amazing dog, you must understand its roots.

Understanding How the Breed Was Developed

A low growl warns of an intruder's presence . . . A steady pull guides a blind person away from danger . . . A hurtling form brings down a fleeing criminal . . . A lithe shape searches a pile of rubble for buried victims . . . A warm body huddles close

to keep a lost person alive . . . The best dog in the world joins his special boy on a grand adventure every day and guards the foot of his bed every night.

Intelligent, loyal, noble, sensitive, courageous — the German Shepherd is what we wish humans were like. It is the dog not only of movie action adventures, but also of real-life heroism. But this wasn't always so. The GSD of today arose from humble beginnings, an unassuming dog with a great work ethic. Many such dogs existed in the late 19th century; what eventually made the German Shepherd different was in large part the life work of a single man. Max von Stephanitz shaped the German Shepherd into the breed that would become the most popular and versatile dog in the world.

Creating the breed

Dogs have shared a relationship with people throughout recorded history — a relationship originally based on function. Some dogs were better at sounding alarms due to intruders, for example, and some were better at chasing down game. Eventually, as breeders mated the best guards to the best guards and the best hunters to the best hunters, breeds were born. As other animal species became domesticated, dogs who could guard and control them became especially important. The German Shepherd claims these early stock-tending dogs as its forefathers.

In time, the strains of dogs became more and more specialized so that by the 19th century, the German countryside was home to a group of adept but diverse sheep-herding dogs. Many of the dogs were not large or tough enough to handle some of the larger, stubborn sheep found in Germany.

Enter Captain Max Emil Frederick von Stephanitz, a cavalry officer who had some knowledge of functional animal anatomy. He admired the German sheepdogs but envisioned a dog who consistently combined all their best traits. Although he experimented (somewhat unsuccessfully) with breeding dogs in the 1890s, his luck changed in 1899, when he found the dog who embodied his ideal. He bought the dog and immediately changed the dog's name to Horand von Grafhath. Having found the dog who would found the breed, von Stephanitz founded a club devoted to the breed, the *Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde* (SV), with Horand the first dog registered.

The SV immediately began holding annual shows, in which von Stephanitz judged and chose the best male (the *Sieger*) and female (the *Siegerin*). He based his awards not only on the dogs' merits but also on their pedigrees and their ability to

counteract prevalent faults in the breed. Because breeders usually flocked to the *Sieger* of the year, von Stephanitz was able to steer the breed's development.

As the SV grew, local branch clubs arose. Local Breed Wardens were appointed who inspected litters and evaluated breedings. This iron-fisted policy may have seemed tough, but it was largely responsible for the breed's rapid rise in quality. The policy is still in place today.

Proving the dogs' usefulness

von Stephanitz demanded that the dogs be useful. Beauty, though appreciated, was not a top priority. Sound temperament and body, as well as a zest for life and work, were paramount, and he devised herding and obedience trials to test them. Yet even as the ultimate German sheepherding breed was growing in popularity, German sheepherding was on the decline. Now that von Stephanitz had created the sheepdog of his dreams, it was threatened with large-scale unemployment!

Leave it to von Stephanitz to reinvent his precious breed, promoting German Shepherds as police and military dogs. Although the military scoffed at the notion at first, he demonstrated the dogs' courage and ability to deter and apprehend criminals by placing several dogs with the police force. As the dogs' reputation for police work grew, the military adopted a few. Those few were so good at their mission that when German troops entered into World War I, they did so with German Shepherds at their sides. Whether searching for wounded soldiers, laying phone lines, or serving as messengers, sentries, or guards, German Shepherds introduced a new element into warfare.

Taking the dogs worldwide

In the early 1900s, purebred dog mania swept across Europe and America. Anything that looked like a pure breed and could be trotted around a show ring was fair game. The German Shepherd was no exception, and the first GSD (then called the German Sheepdog) was registered by the American Kennel Club in 1908. Perhaps because it didn't have the eccentric looks or foo-foo ways of some of the more popular breeds, it wasn't much of a hit, and those early imports had little impact on present GSDs in the United States.

With WWI, all things German became unsavory, and the breed lost much of the favor it had found in America. The American Kennel Club changed the breed's name to Shepherd Dog in an attempt to protect the breed from patriotic zealots.