

The History of the Mudi Breed, Hungary's "Driver Dog"
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The Mudi was discovered as a local Hungarian herding dog type with strong existing breed characteristics and was not created by human dreams of an ideal herding dog, but by need and performance selection. Its origin reaches well back into the 15th to 18th centuries, but the exact time is hard to pinpoint because of the confusion in the nomenclature of the different herding dog breeds of that time and place.

The official Latin name for the breed is *Canis ovilis Fényesi*, and is named for the breed's discoverer, Dr. Dezső Fényes. It was in 1936 that Dr. Fényes's discovered breed, in that time known as the "Driver Dog", was recognized as a breed in Hungary, though common knowledge of the breed appears much earlier on this timeline of the Mudi's existence and discovery than the 1920's. In Hungarian documents from the 17th-18th centuries, description was found of a herding dog with pricked ears and fur like a Mudi has, but were called "Puli's", as well as in the earliest written records of a very similar breed in Croatia, noted in documents dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries.

This breed name confusion of the local herding dog types, leads to the common belief of the Puli being the oldest herding breed in Hungary and that the Mudi and Pumi were formed from the Puli. It is interesting to note however that in the early 20th century, it was not uncommon for Mudi-like puppies to be born into Puli litters and even today, Mudi-like puppies can be born into Pumi litters, but Pumi-like or Puli-like puppies have not been seen in Mudi litters.

It was the general supposition from this name confusion, and the resulting belief that Puli's were the oldest Hungarian herding breed, that the Puli's were crossed with spitz type breeds to create the "newly" discovered Mudi. It is possible that the Mudi, with its outlook and behavior and its many ancient features, is from crosses of the spitz type breeds with other naturally occurring herding breeds of the time and area. The one main exception to the spitz type being the quite wavy to curly coat that the Mudi exhibits. But as the Mudi was only officially recognized as a breed in 1936, and its history

is not precisely known, the common myths filled in the uncertainties and blank periods with what is presently told of its origins.

Dr. Fényes, as a historian and cultural museum curator, often saw this local shepherd dog type in the countryside, on his excursions for relics and traditional folk habits of the local country inhabitants. Many of the local shepherds called the dogs by several names, including Puli and Pumi. He discovered that these shepherd dogs had a homogenous and stable type and soon after he started to collect and breed the best specimens, found that they bred true as a breed as they possessed highly inheritable and stable characteristics. Dr. Fényes wrote in 1935 “The offspring of them show every typical feature of the parents, like in a “true” well selected breed.” It was at this time that he named the breed Mudi, after a most typical specimen of the breed he found bore this name and started to seek recognition of this new breed he discovered.

During the 2nd World War, many Hungarian breeds suffered terrible losses, some almost disappeared and the Mudi was given no immunity as a rare breed. In the 1960's, it was rehabilitated from survivors and in the 1970's, a few kennels worked to revive the breed to its original status in Hungary. It was never a popular breed in its country of origin but always from Dezső Fényes times, it was loved and mentioned as being among the best herding breeds, as well as a good hunting dog, watchdog and companion. So its variability as a multi purpose breed with its many behavioral merits helped it to be re-established and a new standard was written in 1966 to apply for FCI recognition.

Unfortunately this standard, written by a mechanical engineer, Dr. Zoltan Balassy, was admittedly based on only a handful of Mudi specimens he found and the Mudi was redefined as a created breed based on his ideals of how the breed should look, without the natural variability of the breed type. The main differences between the original breed standard and this newly created one are in the accepted sizes and colors. The size was downsized from 40 - 50 cm in males and 35 - 45 cm in females to 35 - 47 cm with no sex separation. The colors were changed from acceptance of all solid colors and merles to only accepting black, white and merle.

As the restoration of the breed went on over the next few decades after the 1966 standard was written, and the reality of the naturally occurring variability was seen in color, a new standard was written in 2000 to add back

most of the original colors. Even this year (2004), the Fakó (yellow or fawn color translation) is being added to the English, French, German and Spanish versions of the FCI standard, to correct the error that was made in translation of the Hungarian 2000 standard, that consequently omitted the translated term for this color.

Even though the Mudi is quite possibly an ancient breed living in a modern world, we should not forget that in today's world another natural herding breed that was developed and selected by shepherds over time, could probably never be recreated again as the real shepherds that herd with dogs everyday, are a dying breed themselves. The Mudi breed is possibly the last naturally developed herding breed that is still working with shepherds and livestock in Hungary today, the Mudi, the "Driver Dog" of Hungary, could never be reproduced in today's modern world.

These few paragraphs tell of its past, but the breeders of today will write the next entries onto the timeline of the Mudi's future. Please take care of it for the shepherds of tomorrow.

"It is a true product of the wise selection efforts of the Hungarian countrymen." Dr. Dezső Fényes, 1935