



Pumi

The pumi may look like a teddy bear that's come to life, but these brainy dogs are more than mere fluff. Find out more about these Hungarian herders with a comically endearing appearance.



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Fun Facts

Pumi

HEIGHT 15–18.5 inches	WEIGHT 22–29 pounds	LIFE SPAN 12–13 years
BREED SIZE medium (26-60 lbs.)		GOOD WITH families, children
TEMPERAMENT willful, outgoing, playful		INTELLIGENCE high
SHEDDING AMOUNT infrequent		EXERCISE NEEDS high
ENERGY LEVEL active	BARKING LEVEL frequent	DROOL AMOUNT low
BREED GROUP herding		COAT LENGTH/TEXTURE medium, curly
COLORS black, fawn, gray, white		PATTERNS brindle, black and tan
OTHER TRAITS easy to train, easy to groom, good hiking companion		

Quick! Close your eyes and try to imagine the cutest dog possible. With his corkscrew curls, circular tail, comical ears, and waggish expression, there's a good chance the pumi looks like the dog of your dreams.

But if you're tempted to judge this furry book by its cover, you should know that the pumi (pronounced P00-mee; plural is "pumik") is more than just an adorable, fluffy face. Indeed, this teddy bear lookalike was originally bred to herd and guard livestock in Eastern Europe, and he is known for his brain as much as for his looks.

The desire to work runs strong in most pumik, so they require an active, engaged owner who can commit to keeping their lively minds and bodies busy each day.

"They are not an easy dog, however cute they look!" says Jane Pooley, who counts two pumik as her companions. "But they are great fun if you are willing to invest enough time and thought."

Appearance

It isn't typically a compliment to be described as a square, but pumik are doing their best to change the maligned shape's perception. According to the pumi breed standard, the dog should have a square outline, with a height between 15–18.5 inches and a weight between 22–29 pounds. All in all, this makes for a lean, agile dog who can easily keep up with his ranch hand duties.

At one corner of the pumi square, you'll find a tail that arches back on itself to form a circle. At the opposite corner, you'll see a long head, dark brown eyes, and fur-covered, semi-erect ears that look like they're in the middle of waving "hello" (an attribute that certainly doesn't hurt their charm). Much like the pumi himself, these ears are alert and active and will move in response to various stimuli.

The pumi is clothed in a coat of attention-grabbing corkscrew curls. The coat consists of both harsh outer hair and a soft undercoat, and it comes in solid shades of black, white, gray, and fawn. And because a working dog with high grooming needs would be counterproductive, you'll be pleased to know that the low-shedding pumi only needs to air dry to achieve that quintessential coiffure.

Temperament

The pumi was bred for a specific task, so discussing his temperament is a little like going over his job description, says Melissa Hatfield, MS, CBCC-KA, CDBC, owner of Loving Dogs in Fayetteville, Ark. And you shouldn't expect these instincts to disappear simply because a pumi is taken out of his workplace.

"Herding requires a keen ability to assess situations quickly and to act decisively—some on his own and some by following human commands," Hatfield explains. In other words, pumik are bold, intelligent, and perpetually reporting for duty. Without proper socialization or outlets for this energy, the breed can become unruly. You might even find that *you* are the one being herded.

"They are a good family pet and enjoy playing with children," says Pooley, who's lived with pumik for nearly six years. "But the herding instinct can come out with humans, dogs, chickens, etc." In addition to their speed and agility, pumik use barking to get livestock in order, which can be problematic for an unsuspecting owner.

On the plus side, Hatfield says that herding dogs are extremely sensitive to the nonverbal cues of their owners and are quick learners. "This is a great advantage in training and in establishing boundaries with the breed's instinctive behaviors," she explains. "For example, a pumi can be taught to herd a ball, not a preschooler, and that it's OK to chase a Frisbee but not a car."

Like most herding dogs, pumik can be reserved around strangers, and they don't enjoy being left alone for long periods. Because they were bred to work alongside humans, they can become particularly close with their leader. And despite their seemingly limitless supply of energy, pumik are not opposed to cuddle breaks (though they must be earned!).

Living Needs

Because pumik are so intelligent and wired for work, Hatfield says they are most likely to thrive in a home with an experienced dog owner who's committed to putting in the time and energy needed to properly socialize and train the new pup and keep him busy each day. This home can include other family members, including children and animals, though introductions would need to be made slowly and carefully.

Exercising your pumi's body and mind on a daily basis is more important than having a large fenced yard or living space, though it's worth noting that their characteristic herding dog bark could make apartment-living a bit difficult.

"I live in a house with a small backyard, but I walk my pumik for an hour each day," Pooley explains. "They would walk for miles, but they thrive on short, brain-stimulating exercises and learning tricks, too. They also love attending agility training sessions two to three times a week."

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Care

Hatfield notes that there is a distinct difference between being sociable and needing socialization. The former refers to a dog's innate temperament, while the later is a set of learned behaviors that help a dog and his owner coexist more harmoniously.

"Pumik are naturally sociable dogs," Hatfield continues. "But since their innate temperament is based on herding livestock, they will need

socialization to make them suitable companions for living in a home."

The first 16 weeks of a dog's life are referred to as the "critical period." It's during this time, Hatfield explains, that the puppy learns how to be a dog (e.g. nonverbal and verbal communication, that fingers are not chew toys, and what is and isn't appropriate when interacting with his fellow littermates). It's also when the puppy begins to learn how to live with humans.

"Whatever occurs during this period has lifelong consequences, either good or bad," Hatfield says. "The dog that doesn't receive proper socialization during his critical period won't reach his fullest capability later in life. For example, puppies that are taken from their mother too early can develop psychological and behavior problems. And those that don't receive enough human interaction can become anxious, nervous, and reactive as they grow older."

For this reason, Hatfield says it's vital for prospective owners to do their due diligence when finding a pumi breeder. "It isn't enough to merely check for a clean kennel environment," she adds. "Puppies need lots of emotional and mental enrichment during their first 16 weeks of life, which includes human interaction and exposure to other appropriately behaved dogs. And these experiences should continue well after the pumi puppy joins a family."

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In addition to proper socialization, training will be an important component of caring for your pumi. Not only will it help your dog better adapt to his environment, but it is also a great tool to keep your pumi's brain engaged. One innate behavior you'll likely want to help your dog manage right away is his penchant for barking. "This behavior is a useful tool when herding or guarding livestock but not so useful and

certainly not appropriate while living in the home," Hatfield says. When working with your pumi, always use positive training methods.

Regular exercise and human interaction are other crucial aspects of the lively pumi's care. Every pumi will be different with regards to what they enjoy most, but obedience classes, nose work, and agility training are a good place to start, as they are appropriate outlets for their herding work instincts.

Finally, as is typical for working dogs, the pumi's grooming routine is fairly fuss-free. The Hungarian Pumi Club of America (HPCA) advises combing his coat every few weeks. After combing, you'll need to wet his fur completely—but leave the blow dryer in the cabinet. It's best to let Mother Nature be the one to dry and shape those characteristic corkscrew curls.

Because pumik are so intelligent and wired for work, they are most likely to thrive in a home with an experienced dog owner who's committed to training and socialization.

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Health

Pumik are generally healthy dogs that can live until the age of 13, but as with any breed, they are predisposed to some health conditions:

Hip dysplasia: The HPCA lists hip dysplasia as the most common health condition in the breed. Hip dysplasia is a developmental condition in which the joints are loose, leading to pain, mobility problems, and osteoarthritis. Though the signs of disease often don't appear until the dog is older, you can screen your pumi for hip dysplasia at a young age with X-rays.

Degenerative myelopathy: According to the HPCA, some pumik carry the gene for degenerative myelopathy, a progressive spinal cord disease that affects older dogs and is similar to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (commonly referred to as simply ALS) in humans.

Primary lens luxation: The HPCA reports that there have been several pumik in Scandinavian countries with primary lens luxation, an inherited condition in which the lens of the eye moves out of its normal position, resulting in inflammation and damage to the optic nerve (called glaucoma). Without treatment, it can cause blindness.

Because both degenerative myelopathy and primary lens luxation are inherited disorders, the HPCA recommends making sure your prospective pumi's parents were DNA tested for the conditions. Before bringing home a pumi puppy from a breeder, ask if all health screenings recommended by the Canine Health Information Center have been conducted.

History

Though the pumi wasn't recognized by the American Kennel Club until

2016, these pups are not a new breed. There are three distinct herding breeds indigenous to Hungary: the puli, the mudi, and the pumi. The puli is thought to be the oldest of the trio, with his ancestors migrating to what is now Hungary in 800 A.D. According to the HPCA, around 300 years ago, pulik (the plural form of puli) began mating with herding dogs from France and Germany as livestock trading brought their masters in close company and that the pumi is a result of this crossbreeding.

The present-day pumi, the HPCA says, was created through hundreds of years of selection by shepherds as they crafted the ideal dog for both the land and their livestock. However, it wasn't until the early 1900s that the breed became distinct from the puli. Before this point, the two breed names were used interchangeably. A professor at the Hungarian University of Veterinary Medicine named Emil Raitsits was the one who finally pushed for the standardization of both the pumi and the puli.

The first pumik to enter the U.S. on record arrived in the 1980s (though it's possible and likely that others came much earlier). The club adds that the breed remains rare, with only a few litters born each year.

Fun Facts

Despite having a very serious and important job in history (and often still today), the breed is sometimes referred to as "the clown," likely because their ears are such a singular blend of comedy and theatrics!

When Hungarians began taking a closer look at their indigenous herding dogs, the HPCA says they found that the three breeds clustered in separate regions. The puli was mostly in the eastern plains, the mudi was more prevalent in the south, and the pumi

dominated the hilly country of western Hungary.