

The Breed Which is Kept Alive by its Variability: Our Mysterious MUDI

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"It is so curious that we, Hungarians cannot, and even want not to appreciate our own treasures!" – Dr. Dezső Fényes, 1936

WHAT COULD BE THAT FORCE, WHICH MAKES PARTICULAR PEOPLE LIKE MANIACS, TO DEAL WITH THINGS WHICH ARE WORTHLESS, IGNORED IN THE EYES OF THE MAJORITY OF OTHERS? THIS IS A REASONABLE QUESTION, IF WE THINK ABOUT THE MAN WHO DISCOVERED THE MUDI, THIS QUITE UNKNOWN BREED IN THESE DAYS, TOO. BUT THE SAME GOES FOR THOSE, ALSO, WHO DEAL WITH THIS BREED RECENTLY, AS WELL. THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN WITH THE WISH OF THE AUTHOR TO TRY AND EXPLAIN TO YOU THAT SECRET WHICH ONCE MADE US MUDI-LOVERS, AND WHICH IS LIVING IN OUR HEARTS SINCE THEN, ALSO.

The start was quite hard, but also like a fairy tale...

The discovery of the breed and the first description of it was typically a one-man crusade. Dr. Dezső Fényes, the one who did this was a kind of classical polyhistor, he was the director of the Museum of Balassagyarmat in Hungary. He was a great lover of traditional folk-habits and relics, and he spread his interest not only over ancient tools and stories, but also over traditional domestic animals, too. He wrote about this: *„The local people in Nograd-county are called „the palóc's”. So the local „Nagy Ivan” Museum's major task is the preservation of the reminders (material and cultural too) of the palóc people, which are diminishing very quickly. Such a true folk-relic is the „driver-dog”, too, which shares the fate of the other old traditions – it is on the edge of the final end. I, as the director of the Museum feel that we should take attention to the „driver-dog”.*

Dr. Fényes was a genuine expert of dog-breeding as well. He recognized quite easily that a particular dog type, which was called by the shepherds simply the „driver dog”, represents a quite homogenous and stable type. He supposed that it could be fixed easily as a new breed. At the same time, the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries was the golden age of traditional Hungarian dogbreeds. Especially the enthusiastic work of Emil Raitsits and Csaba Anghi served for the description and classification of the Hungarian herding dogs. However, the dog which we know as „Mudi”, remained out of their sight up until the twenties of the 20th century. Only Dezső Fényes was the one, who searched for and bought with a never ceasing wish the best specimens of the „driver dogs”. After this he started to breed them. Soon he could prove that he was right; the driver dog behaved truly as a „breed” should do it; the characteristics of it were highly inheritable and stable. After this he started to seek support for his new breed, the so-called „Mudi”, from the higher authorities of Hungary. He did succeed only at the mid-thirties. In 1936 with the approved standard the newest Hungarian breed was born officially – for becoming NOT popular around the world!

Resurrection... again

World War II brought the hell to Hungary in the years of 1944 and 1945. Almost all the registered Mudis were killed, they shared the fate of the other courageous herding dogs. They were defending bravely the properties and other goods of their masters, even against the much more powerful and armed conquerors. The re-establishment of the breed was to occur only in the sixties, and again, a few enthusiastic and ardent people were involved in that. The new, now even international standard, which was made by the laborious work of Dr. Zoltán Balássy, contained several significant differences in comparison with the first standard, made by Dr. Dezső Fényes. It was probably caused by the extreme rarity of the Mudis, which allowed Dr. Balássy to examine only a few specimens before he recreated the standard. The most obvious differences were the shrinking of the acceptable height of the Mudis and the loss of almost all the color variant from the standard. The Mudi remained quite unpopular just up to the eighties, its population (the number of the registered Mudis) stagnated on a very low level. However, it became obvious that the color variants, described by Dr. Dezső Fényes, are still existing ones. This led to the new standard (2001), where almost all the colors were included again. There are quite few registered Mudis in Hungary in our days, too, there could be hardly more than 1000 of them alive. What is much more alarming, there are only 100-200 puppies being born and given pedigrees per year. It is obvious why the Hungarian Kennel Club (MEOE) did give the right of entering the dog shows free for the Mudis in 2002. Only four Hungarian breeds (rough-haired Magyar Vizsla, Magyar Agár, Erdélyi Kopó, Mudi) have this right, which is quite a pleasant condition for the owners and breeders, but it also means that the given breed is in a difficult position.

Pricked ears, happy and smart face, softly curling locks...

Not only a Mudimaniac can consider at the first glance that this medium-sized herding dog is quite a cute one! The Mudi has a very proportionate, harmonically built bodyshape, its movement can be characterized just the same. Its most beautiful, charming part is the head, and its coat is also very pleasant to touch and to maintain. Its fur feels thick, but it is never gets wooly. Traditionally its head is described as „fox-faced” – and this is not a wrong description; the ears are alertly pricked, its eyes are a little bit almond shaped, the hairs on its face are very short, and its head shape is like a wedge. Truly, it resembles the smart predator quite well. The face of the Mudi has a broad variety of expressions, but two are missing from among these; a Mudi never seems to be savage or menacing. Its face could be happy, questioning, interested, alert, or even sad and melancholy, too.

The Mudi's coat is a unique one. It is strong and thick, but at the same time it is softly waving and curly, too. Its locks are 6-7 cm long. This general appearance changes only on the face, on the front side of the legs and on the paws; these parts are covered with very short hairs. A Mudi, with the longest locks on its tail and the back side on its legs is a very cute dog! Especially the adult males could have considerable mane on their neck and thick „pants” on their thighs. During the course of yearly shedding even the nicest show Mudis can alter significantly. Loosing the majority of their fur, a Mudi could become a

little bit „skinny” until the end of summer. There are several hair types in the breed. We should think it undesirable, if the Mudi has on its whole body too short, or too straight fur. Perhaps the worst version is the long, straight fur, which makes the Mudi look like a small Belgian Shepherd dog. Very beautiful are the strongly curled specimens, but the most typical ones have a more wavy, than curly coat.

The solid colours and the cifra's (merles)

There are many people who are surprised when they are told that there were not only black, but other colored Mudis, too. The „colored” mudis are quite unknown, however Dr. Dezső Fényes described all the colors even back in the twenties! We consider the following colors to be authentic for the Mudi breed: ash (hamvas), ash-brown (hamvasbarna), black (fekete), blue merle (cifra), brown (barna), brown merle (barna cifra), yellow (fakó), white (fehér). If we think on the genetic base, it is easy to recognize that the Mudi has almost all the solid colors, and additionally the combinations of these with the merle color. It is very important to know that all these color variants are equally good and healthy, none of them are attached to some maladapted feature. It means that a responsible breeder should protect and maintain all of these colors if the litter contains „colored” puppies. It is very sad when excellent brown, ash, etc., puppies are given away without pedigrees.

We should mention that rarely other colors than the above listed ones, can occur too. These are the black and tan, wolfcolor, brindle and maszkos fakó (masked yellow). The original description (1936) of the breed did not mention these. Apart from their color, these Mudis usually show other features (head shape, coat texture, body proportions) which more resemble other breeds, for example the German Shepherd dog. Therefore we consider them as the possible heritage of mongrels produced by Mudis and German Shepherd dogs not so far back in time. Luckily there are only a few of them in Hungary. We know however some of them from Scandinavia, where they have even become successful sporting dogs, too. Of course, they could be great companions and working dogs, but we should avoid them as a breeding dog, and the responsible breeders will not repeat a mating where such puppies were born once.

An extraordinary herding dog

The Mudi is without doubt a herding dog from its toes up to the top of its head. There are great possibilities in this breed, and these are more considerable if we think about how many Mudis (or Mudi-like dogs) are working with shepherds and cattle herders in our days, even. It is very important that the modern breeding of the Mudi should not make this dog unable to work in the future. The Mudi was and is a tough working dog, and I have the strong belief that the ability to herd is in strong connection with the ability for any other working tasks. It is not right to say that „I don't care about the herding, that belongs to the past, but without herding abilities the Mudi is still a superb working dog”. Telling the truth, from my opinion just the long selection for being an excellent sheepdog was the key to make this breed suitable for the modern sport activities. What characteristics do I think to be

important for this? A good ability to learn, balanced but high temperament, assertiveness and the unconditioned acceptance of the owner as a leader. If the Mudi would lose its ability to herd, it would mean that the above mentioned characteristics would also become paler.

Herding is one of the most complex traditional dog tasks. It did not just happen that sheepdogs became the most intelligent and mostly man-centered breeds. They were selected for these features for long, long centuries. During herding, the sheepdog works on its own, it makes decisions. On the other hand, the sheepdog has to keep one eye continuously on its master, waiting his commands. A herding dog can never be disobedient, and sometimes it should work until it is totally exhausted. Sheepdogs are taught how to herd over quite a long training period, so they must not be headstrong or stubborn. The Mudi is a dog which just exactly fits to the above listed requirements. It is a versatile breed, depending on the part of the country, it is used either for herding sheep or driving cattle. These two utilizations need totally different teaching methods. The most relevant difference between the two lays perhaps in the level of physical aggression needed from the dog. A cattle herding Mudi has to be very tough, it has to bite fiercely the cows. In contrast, a sheep-herding Mudi should be much more „gentle”, it is allowed only to nip the sheep, if it is needed. The herding technique of the Mudis can be characterized by vigorous barking and fierce chases. But if the sheep are obedient and do what they have to do, the Mudi changes its behaviour to a more economic style and it prowls lazily at the heels of its master.

I have met the best behaving Mudis at the shepherd's side. They were not humble, but the slightest signal from their master was enough for them to stop anything they were doing, and they became alert for the wishes of him. They were unbelievably friendly towards us, strangers, and literally sought the possibility for getting a little stroking from us. We should emphasize this strongly, because the Mudi is known at the same time as a courageous watchdog, a true pest for the postman and other „intruders”. The key is the presence of the shepherd in our situation – in these cases the Mudi hands over the task to him to deal with the strangers. These experiences made me revise my former thoughts about the „necessary shyness” of the Mudi. I believe that this is only a self-excuse for the owners who have poorly socialized dogs. Of course, the Mudi is a typical one-owner dog, but if it is given the required amount of social interaction in its puppyhood, and it is trained firmly, every Mudi can become a pleasant companion in public places, too.

The „famous” B-pedigree

The vast majority of dog breeds come with closed pedigrees. The owners of these cannot even imagine that their dog could have „empty cells” among its ancestors. The special history of the Mudi and the permanent lack of the necessary amount of breeding animals however needed the Mudi registry to be kept open. Those Mudis who have some unknown ancestors, we discriminate from the ones which have a closed pedigree with a „B” in their registration number. However, the most interesting and important benefit coming from the open registry is the possibility for getting „new” Mudis from the countryside. Imagine a breeder, who glances a superb Mudi-like dog,

working beside a shepherd. The breeder needs some new bloodline in his/her kennel, so he/she tries to convince the shepherd to take the dog to a breeding examination. Suppose now that this convincing was a successful one, and the dog is traveled to the examination. There the judge checks it thoroughly, and if he/she considers it to be a Mudi in the needed extent, the dog will given the B-pedigree, and depending on its quality, it may get a permission for breeding. This dog will have no ancestors written to its pedigree, however from this time it will be approved officially to be a Mudi. I cannot imagine a moment of handling the breed, which should be dealt with greater caution and care, than the giving of these „empty” B-pedigrees. It is very important that only the best specimens are to be entered to the breed officially. Further, the new B-mudi should be bred only with the continuous control of the responsible Club. There is a possibility that in vain a particular dog resembles totally a true Mudi, its outer appearance covers some unpleasant surprises. When the first puppies are born, it might be revealed that our beloved B-Mudi was a mongrel. To make this revelation quicker and more sure, the new B-Mudis should be bred only with a mate with a closed pedigree, which bears surely all the breed specific features.

Some unorthodox thoughts about the origin and relatives of the Mudi

The Mudi is not only a breed which was described quite late, but its origin has some uncertainties and blank periods to a considerable extent. Further, I think that the official Mudi history has serious errors or misunderstandings within it. The official breed standard and the textbooks tell us that the Mudi was formed in the 18th-19th century, from the mixing of Hungarian herding breeds (especially the Puli) with various pricked eared western breeds, like Spitzes. This theory has many shortcomings, now I want to emphasize a further issue with the introduction of an almost unknown breed, the Croatian Sheepdog (CS). This breed is the closest relative of the Mudi. There is almost no one in Hungary who has seen a living CS, but who has had the opportunity for doing this, can state that the two breeds are almost the same. Going further, the Croats who know the Mudi, are telling the same thing. Of course, if somebody has the time and energy for doing this, he/she can compare the two standards row by row and can find some differences between the Mudi and the CS. But these differences exist mainly on paper, and when we are faced with the living examples, we will feel how slight is the border between the two breeds. Perhaps the most pronounced difference is the lack of other colors except black in the CS. However, this feature is quite easy to reach and maintain with appropriate selection. Telling the truth, it is very unlikely that the two breeds had different origins. Hungary and Croatia are not only two neighboring countries, but they formed political unity for more than 500 years, too. And what is good for the Mudi-lovers, is the fact that the Croats registered the history of their CS back until the 14th century!

May I ask then, how we think after all this, about the Mudi's official history, coming up with the Puli-Spitz mixing theory with 400-500 years after the CS was mentioned in the Croatian chronicles? The question becomes more interesting, if we consider those old Hungarian documents from the 17th-18th century, which are telling about pricked eared dogs with fur like the

Mudi has – but they call these dogs „Pulis”. In the first decades of the 20th century it was not unusual if a Puli-litter had some Mudi-like puppies born in it. Such „accidents” are still happening in Pumi litters even today. It might be that the history of the Mudi went into a false direction when the Puli became considered as the most ancient Hungarian herding dog. From that time the Pumi and the Mudi were allowed to be regarded as some derivatives from the „ancient” Puli type. It was done „successfully” with the theories which were hypothesized of some interbreeding between the Puli and some strange breeds (terriers for the Pumi, Spitzes for the Mudi). From my opinion however, the Mudi-like dog type (pricked ears, not-wooly fur, short hair on face, sickle like tail over the back) is much older than we could expect. This unorthodox hypothesis gains further support if we consider the Mudi-like puppies coming quite regularly from Pumi and Puli litters. Of course I want not to partake in the game entitled „our breed is the most ancient one”. I only want to decipher more accurately the Mudi’s history.

The Mudi in the modern world

We are thinking always about how we could find a worthy place for this lively and intelligent herding breed in our world, which is filled with the most exotic and popular breeds. In this quest, we Hungarians are getting continuously, highly appreciated help from abroad, from a handful of the most enthusiastic „Mudimaniacs”. Apart from Hungary, the most considerable Mudi population does exist in Scandinavia, mostly in Finland. They show a good example for us how to give a new task to this breed. There, up in the North the Mudi is among the most popular sport and working breeds (agility, obedience, search and rescue, tracking). We can be only envious if we think of how strictly the Finns deal with the question of health issues, especially with the checking of inheritable joint deformities. We know of excellent Mudi kennels in the Netherlands and France, too. In the United States and Canada the Mudi-lovers have started to form their first associations and clubs. So we can say the Hungarian breeders and judges have the almost historical responsibility for helping our friends abroad to establish and maintain the best possible breeding populations. It is very important that only excellent animals should be sold abroad and the Hungarian judges should help with their decisions to choose the best animals for further breeding. Otherwise, if we see some foreign owned dog which is very far from being an ideal Mudi, how could we blame its breeder for producing such a „terrible” animal. Just remember, its ancestors were sold by somebody in Hungary, perhaps with the note „for them it will be good enough”. Hungary is the motherland and breed-owner country of the Mudi. We have the rare opportunity to show something good to the whole world.

We should consider the fundamental points for the breeding of the Mudi. These are the following: (1) Only the well-behaved (stable nerves, good herding instinct), displasya-free animals should be used for breeding. (2) Wise propagation of the breed, which means that the Mudi is not for everybody, but whoever wants a high-temperament, sensitive, intelligent, keen-to-work dog, mostly that person should choose the Mudi! (3) Teach the people how to socialize a Mudi puppy. This latter point is very important. If we don’t want our Mudi’s to become a shy, antisocial dog, we should take it frequently among

people and other dogs during its first year of life. A Mudi literally cannot be given too many tasks. On the other hand, the boring, monotonous heelwork is not for this breed. Telling the truth, for a Mudi the herding is the most suitable work, not to mention that its owner can find herding as a great amusement, too. Luckily we have plenty of Clubs who feels the necessity of organizing herding competitions and they deal also with the training of herding dogs.

I can advise a Mudi for anybody, who wants a dog which is not affected by the weather, is quite low-maintenance, but at the same time it is easy to keep in the house, too. The Mudi does not shed too much fur, and it is almost totally odorless! The Mudi is not a „bear-killer” breed, those who want a tough Schutzhund dog, perhaps would do better if they chose another, more suitable breed for that. The Mudi likes to nap lazily on the furniture, but it is truly a lively and busy dog. Don't let perish this willingness for work! The Mudi is for those who love the intelligent, teachable dogs. The Mudi is for those who love the dog sports, or even to go for the dog shows. A well-socialized Mudi likes the challenges in every competition or show. The Mudi is faithful to its owner to the extremes – those, who do not like a tirelessly following little shadow in their heels, should not choose this breed. The Mudi is an excellent watchdog around the house, but it is not a fighting dog who deters the burglars. It is not an ever barking breed, whatever the rumors are telling. It is quite easy to teach a Mudi not to bark, if we teach it at the same to bark on a command. Banning and letting it use this action will help each other's effect. And finally, the Mudi is an ideal dog for everybody who is afraid that their dog would be lost during a walk! With a Mudi such a thing cannot almost happen. Perhaps it carries this feature in its genes – its ancient relatives, beside the shepherds, should have been ready for use at all times.

Dear friends, lovers of dogs! Please, help us that the cited motto of Dr. Dezső Fényes would not remain always over the Mudi as a wrong omen!

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Breed characteristics

Overall appearance: Middle-sized, quadratic sheepdog.

Head: The skull and the forehead are slightly convex. The bony arches over the eyes are not too strong. The stop is weak. The nose is black in the black, the blue-merle, the yellow and the white Mudis. The nose is brown in the brown and the brown-merle dogs. The ash Mudis have a grey nose. The pink patched, wrongly pigmented nose is an excluding fault. The lips have the same color as the nose, they are tight. The Mudi has complete dentition, the undershot and overshot bites are excluding faults. The eyes are slightly almond shaped, the glance of a Mudi is never dull, but lively and smart. Generally the darker the eyes, the better is the quality. In brown and ash Mudis the amber colored eyes are acceptable. In merle Mudis the blue, or blue-brown sprinkled eyes are acceptable. The yellow eyes are unacceptable in black dogs. The ears are pricked and attached high, they are reverse V-shaped, they should be never rounded. The ears are well furred, tiny locks often reach over the outer edge of the ears.

Neck: It is rather highly attached, it has a 50-55 degree angle with the horizontal line. It is arched a little, well muscled, and of mid-length.

Trunk: The withers are defined, well muscled and long. The loin is mid-length and tight. The hindquarters are short, slightly sloped and well muscled. The depth of the chest is at the knees. The chest side is rather more flat than rounded. The stomach is slightly tucked up, but it is not like that of the greyhounds.

Tail: A small proportion of Mudis are born with a very short, or mid-length tail. However, using two parents with normal length tails, such short tailed puppies should never be born to them. Traditionally the tail is often docked. In the recent years it is becoming undesirable among the breeders. If we consider the position of the tail and how important it is for the estimation of the nervous stability and shyness, we can conclude that it is better to not cut down the tails. The tail is attached mid-height, ideally it is held over the back like a sickle during movement or in an alert position. A tail which is tightly flattened onto the back is a smaller fault than an ever-hanging one.

Front legs: The elbows should be straight, but a slight bending outwards is still acceptable. The front legs are straight, the shoulders are well muscled. The feet turned outwards is a fault. The paws are small, tight and with closed toes. The claws are dark colored.

Hindlegs: They are positioned backwards slightly. The thighs are long and well muscled.

Movement: If pacing, the Mudi's steps are short and quick. Its trotting is energetic and it gallops with long jumps. The Mudi is an extremely fast dog, its speed can reach easily 50 km/h (30 mph).

Coat: Beside the already written points, in general we can state that the white patches are undesirable. A palm sized white patch is acceptable on the chest, as are white marks on the toes. On merled dogs the white chest patch could be larger (this is the effect of the merle gene), but this is not a fault. Any other white patches on the dog are exclusive faults.

Size: Males (41-47 cm, 11-15 kg), bitches (38-44 cm, 8-12 kg). We should add here that the Mudi population shows a great variability in the height, with a bias toward the taller dogs. We should consider that the first standard of the Mudi (by Dezső Fényes) gave the height of the breed between 40 and 50 cm. The shepherds and cattle herders prefer usually the larger specimens for the hard work. Considering this, perhaps it would be reasonable to return the height limits to those in the first standard for the Mudi.

Pictures:



The cifra (blue merle) variant was believed extinct after World War II. The recovery of this nice color is to the merit of Mrs. Zsuzsanna Szabó, who found the foremother of all the known recent merle dogs: Picur. (photo by Andrea Olajos)



Love at first lick. Newly tattooed brown puppy and her happy, new owner at the Pásztor-Virtus kennel. (photo by Pongrácz)



Noticeably feminine, light boned bitch from the Pásztor-Virtus kennel (photo by Pongrácz)



Total alertness at a herding competition. Beautiful white male and bitch from the Sacaházi kennel. (photo by Kati Timár-Geng)



Who knows? Perhaps these ancient type Hungarian cattle were also herded by Mudi-like dogs a thousand years ago? (photo by Andrea Olajos)



Where a Mudi really thrives; beside the sheep! (photo by Kati Timár-Geng)



Who could resist a glance like this? The face of a mudi is never aggressive or mean. (photo by Pongrácz)



The future of the breed depends on its new occupations. A yellow male, from the Szürkevillám kennel, is performing agility. (photo by Fábíán)



Quite often a single litter could contain several color variants. Blue merle mother with her yellow, blue merle and black puppies. (photo by Mónika Csíkvári)



A rare, but cute color variant: the brown merle. This bitch won BOB at the 2003 Club Show of the Fényes Dezső Mudi Club. (photo by Pongrácz)



The ashbrown mudi is extremely rare. (photo by Kati Timár-Geng)



Tell me please, where is the huge difference between the two breeds? The history of the Croatian Sheepdog could be the key for the Mudi's one, too. (photo by Roberto Photo Team)



At 5 weeks of age the puppies ears are usually still flopped down. Black and yellow littermates from the Pásztor-Virtus kennel. (photo by József Szűcs)



Frost-proof mudis from Finland. (photo by Terhi Multamäki)



How should I call this dog? She was also born from a Mudi-mother. Maszkos fakó dog from Finland. (photo by Terhi Multamäki)



Example for the ideal pigmentation of nose and lips. Young yellow male from the Pásztorálom kennel. (photo by Pongrácz)



Noticeably masculine, a beautiful, curly haired male from the Körösháti-Pásztor kennel. It is worth a glance to his robust body structure. (photo by Andrea Olajos)