



# Bouvier des Flandres



## *Further Information about the Bouvier des Flandres:*

**American Kennel Club**

[www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)

**American Bouvier des Flandres  
Club**

[www.bouvier.org](http://www.bouvier.org)

**Southern California Bouvier des  
Flandres Club**

[www.scbdfc.com](http://www.scbdfc.com)

***Bouvier des Flandres, The Dogs of  
Flanders Fields.*** Engel, James R.  
1991 Alpine Publishing Company

## Club of Northern California



[www.TheBouvierClub.com](http://www.TheBouvierClub.com)

[www.TheBouvierClub.com](http://www.TheBouvierClub.com)

## *What is the Bouvier des Flandres?*

The Bouvier des Flandres is a powerfully built, compact, short coupled, rough-coated dog of notably rugged appearance. They give the impression of great strength without any sign of heaviness or clumsiness in their overall makeup. They are agile, spirited and bold, yet their serene, well-behaved disposition denotes their steady, resolute and fearless character. Their gaze is alert and brilliant, depicting their intelligence, vigor and daring. By nature they are an equable dog. Their origin is that of a cattle herder and general farmer's helper, including cart pulling. They are an ideal farm dog. Their harsh coat protects them in all weather, enabling them to perform the most arduous tasks. They have been used as an ambulance and messenger dog during World Wars. Modern times find them as a watch and guard dog, as well as a family friend, guardian and protector. Their physical and mental characteristics and deportment, coupled with their olfactory abilities, intelligence and initiative enable them to also perform as a tracking dog and guide dog for the blind.

## *Bouvier History*

The Bouvier des Flandres or "*Cattle Dog of Flandres*" originated in the low-lying areas of what is now Belgium and the Netherlands. Documentation of its ancestry is cloudy, but its beginnings are loosely attributed to a type of sheepdog (Berger), the Dutch Griffon, and the Barbet. Bouvier ancestors were working cattle and farm dogs that herded and defended the cattle, drove the livestock to market, pulled the farmers' carts and served as guardians of the family and farm. Those early dogs were differing physical types, but common characteristics were bobtails, cropped ears, harsh, tousled coats and natural instincts for guarding the herd, home and family.

By the beginning of this century, breeders began selecting for uniformity of type, and

Available, for transfer when the puppy is delivered.

Reputable breeders do not always have puppies available, but know of and can recommend other breeders expecting litters, or will take reservations for upcoming litters. Reputable breeders will screen prospective buyers before selling a puppy. Be prepared to answer a fair amount of questions concerning your family and lifestyle: there is a reason for this—breeders are interested in the lifelong welfare of their dogs and want to ensure that their puppies are placed in appropriate homes.

If possible, visit prospective breeders prior to making a commitment to purchase a puppy. Look at and evaluate the temperament of the dam and ask to see photos of the sire if he is not on site. Are the premises clean; do all the dogs look healthy? Ask if the pups will be docked and cropped—although cropping is now banned in many countries worldwide, it remains the norm in the United States. If your preference is un-cropped ears, ask the breeder if cropping is optional.

Ask to see the OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) certifications for both sire and dam. If the breeder claims AKC titles for either of the parents (conformation championship, obedience, tracking, herding, etc), ask to see proof of said title(s). Be wary of involved contracts requiring you to breed the dog, but don't be surprised if the breeder asks for an altering/spaying agreement; conscientious breeders will withhold the AKC papers of a pup until it is spayed or neutered if they do not feel that the pup is suitable to be used for breeding.

If your lifestyle cannot handle the rough and tumble of puppyhood, you may want to consider a rescue Bouvier. Contact BCNC for Bouvier rescue organizations in the United States. When given the attention, care and training they need and deserve, will be a loving and devoted family companion for a lifetime.

## *So You Want to Get a Bouvier... Things to Consider.*

If you have decided that a Bouvier will fit in with your lifestyle, get to know as many Bouviers as you can. Visit dog shows, obedience and working events. Talk to fanciers—exhibitors and spectators. Also ask your veterinarian or local dog trainers, research websites, and the Bouvier des Flandres Club of Northern California (BCNC) for names of Bouvier owners and breeders in your area. Meet as many fanciers, & their Bouviers, to get a thorough overview of Bouvier ownership.

Please DO NOT RUSH to buy the first Bouvier puppy available. It is very important that you purchase your puppy from a reputable breeder; one dedicated to the protection and preservation of the Bouvier des Flandres as it was designed in Europe. Your breeder must stand behind the puppies “for better or for worse”; be honest about the health and temperament of the puppies; check breeding stock for health and temperament, participate in conformation, herding, Schutzhund and/or the obedience ring, and work with the puppies to provide a good start in socialization.

A reputable breeder will stand behind the puppies they produce and will, should it become necessary, take the puppy or dog back, and place the puppy in a suitable home or help find a replacement. A reputable breeder will also support and guide you throughout the dog’s life. Most will not find it necessary to advertise in the classified ads of the newspaper. Successful breeders attract buyers through their dog activities and the reputation of previous litters and breeding stock. The fact that puppies are “AKC Registered” says nothing about the quality of the puppies. It merely means that the puppies’ parents are AKC registered. Reputable breeders will have all the paperwork in order, with litter registrations

the dog we know today as the Bouvier des Flandres evolved. The first “standard” for the Bouvier des Flandres was developed in 1912; the Club National Belge du Bouvier des Flandres, formed in 1922, formulated specific qualities of type for future breeding. The first and second World Wars, however, severely reduced the population of Bouviers; a few survived as ambulance bearers, as guards and messengers for the army and resistance movements, and as military tracking aids. Consequently, the Bouviers of today trace their lineage to a small and common gene pool.

Bouviers were imported into the United States in the late 1920’s, with the first two being registered in the AKC stud book in 1931. They remained an extremely rare breed in the United States until the late 1960’s when European breeding stock began being imported in large numbers. Since the late 1960’s, the popularity of the Bouvier has been slowly but steadily increasing in this country.

The heritage of the Bouvier is that of a working dog. In many European countries, working dogs cannot win a championship until they prove themselves by gaining a working title. The American Kennel Club includes the Bouvier in the Herding Group—and the Bouvier excels at herding. They have a unique herding style; not “heel nippers” like some of the herding breeds, the Bouvier has been known to throw a body block to bump the errant sheep or cow into place. Bouviers are also used in the U.S. for police work, as therapy dogs, for search and rescue, and as seeing eye dogs for the blind. The Bouvier is an excellent competitor in the sport of Schutzhund and in tracking and obedience competition; however, their primary function is as a loyal and intelligent family companion. The Bouvier des Flandres, however is not the perfect breed for everyone. Some of the physical and temperamental characteristics that make them unique can also make them unsuitable for some families or lifestyles.

## *Physical Characteristics*

The Bouvier is a large, extremely powerful dog — the average male is approximately 26 inches at the shoulder and weighs approximately 90 to 100 pounds. The average female is a bit smaller, standing an average of 25 inches at the shoulder and weighing approximately 80 to 85 pounds. The head is massive (although the female's head is finer and more feminine) with a uniquely identifying beard and mustache giving the Bouvier "that gruff expression so characteristic of the breed". They have a double coat comprised of a soft, dense under coat and a rough, harsh outer coat "capable of withstanding the hardest work in the most inclement weather".

## *Temperament*

In temperament and personality, Bouviers are unique, a direct result of their heritage as a cattle herder. They are calm, rational and very intelligent with an independent nature. Once past puppyhood, they are normally quiet and non-destructive indoors. They can be stubborn and headstrong, but given strong leadership and proper training methods, they are very trainable. They are excellent watchdogs, naturally protective, but slow to respond aggressively, seeming to know instinctively who is — and who is not — a threat. The Bouvier tends to be aloof and reserved with strangers but strongly devoted to family.

Bouviers are well-qualified manipulators, and obedience training is mandatory. They will learn quickly, but only if they perceive the owner as pack leader. Firm, fair, self-assured and assertive leadership is necessary for keeping the Bouvier's independence in check. "The Bouvier does much better with the person who perceives himself as a leader rather than a master."

Bouviers thrive on companionship; they are very sensitive, become deeply attached to their family and will develop

various bad habits, as well as becoming unsociable and very unhappy, if relegated to the backyard, kennel or basement. They are happiest when allowed to sleep next to the bed at night and follow their people everywhere (even to the bathroom!!!). Their natural protectiveness is a direct result of their heritage as a working cattle and farm dog. They will exhibit this protectiveness by growling and barking at anyone or anything perceived to be a threat. Although they don't tend to bark excessively, the Bouvier's owner must deal with this behavior in an appropriate manner. Bouviers are by nature a guard dog.

They are not "self-socializing" as are various other breeds, notably the Golden Retriever. The owners must assist the Bouvier puppy in the socialization process, exposing it to as many different people and situations as possible. This socialization is mandatory to avoid aggression and/or fearfulness in the adult dog.

## *Grooming*

The shaggy coat of the Bouvier requires a great deal of maintenance. That beautiful, tousled, natural-looking coat one sees in the show ring is the result of hours and hours of hand-stripping, plucking and scissoring. Even the Bouvier who will never see the show ring must be professionally groomed every six to eight weeks. The coat must be regularly combed and brushed; loose hairs are retained by the harsh outer-coat and must be brushed out to avoid matting. **A minimum of 30 minutes per week is required** for regular grooming (Bouviers do shed, though not excessively.)

The characteristic Bouvier beard is often wet from drinking or panting and will drip onto floors, carpets and peoples' laps. The beard will also collect particles of food, dirt, leaves, etc., and must be kept clean. "Vuilbaard", the Flemish nickname for the Bouvier, meaning "dirty beard", accurately describes the breed.