

# What kind of dog is Max?

Max is a Bergamasco, which is an Italian sheepdog, (although he was born in Sweden and flew to Philadelphia when he was just eight weeks old!). They are an ancient breed and trace their origins back at least 2,000 years. Believed to have originated in Persia, they are hardy, vigorous shepherding dogs that worked with their nomadic masters, tending and herding flocks of sheep in harsh mountain climates. Some of these nomads and their dogs ultimately settled in the Italian Alps near Bergamo giving the breed its name.

Unlike other shepherding breeds which are taught to execute exact commands from their masters, the Bergamasco was bred to solve problems on its own. In the isolated high mountain valleys, one human and a small number of dogs would tend hundreds of sheep, so the shepherd needed his helpers to be as independent as possible. While it learned to take the lead from its shepherd, the manner in which it accomplished its task was up to the dog. It learned to identify problems, think its way through them, and accomplish the goal in whichever way seemed best in the ever changing environment of the mountain valleys.

## Why is his hair like that?

The Bergamasco's coat evolved to protect them from the elements. The felt-like dreadlocks insulate them from cold and heat and form a natural raincoat that prevents water from coming into contact with his skin. This thick coat also protects him from snake and insect bites. The hair that covers their eyes serves as a visor so they are not dazzled by the sun reflecting off snow in the mountains. It also allows them to look at in any direction, even towards the sun.

The Bergamasco's coat is made up of three types of hair, not fur. The hair does not cord, (cording is the twisting of hairs together to create a spiral strand). Strands of hair weave together creating flat layers called flocks.

The three types of hair are:

**The Undercoat**, fine dense and oily (not greasy) to the touch which forms a waterproof, protective layer.

**The Goat hair** which looks like thin gray strands is strong and harsh similar to the coat of a goat.

**The Woolly top coat**, which is finer and softer to the touch.

The combination of the woolly hair mixed with the goat hair weave together to create the flock.

You can learn even more about Bergamascos from these sites:

<http://silverpastori.com/> or <http://www.bergamascousa.org/>