

# **Congratulations on your Greater Swiss Mountain Dog!**

**The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog  
Club of America  
– the AKC parent club for the GSMD –  
welcomes you to the world  
of "Swissies" and offers this  
brief introduction to the breed.**



**The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog** (or *Grosser Schweizer Sennenhund* as the breed is known in Switzerland) is a large, powerful dog that was originally developed for draft work, livestock management, and as a farm sentinel. "Swissies" (as they are referred to by many enthusiasts) can make fine companions provided that their owners expend the time and energy required to properly develop the robust mental and physical characteristics of these dogs.

## **Physical Appearance**

Adult males stand 25 1/2 to 28 1/2 inches at the highest point of the shoulder and generally weigh between 115 and 140 pounds when fully grown. Females are 23 1/2 to 27 inches in height and generally weigh 85 to 110 pounds at adulthood.

The GSMD has a black base coat and markings of rust and white. The coat is composed of two layers: A dense, black top coat 1 to 1 3/4 inches in length, and a fine undercoat which may be quite thick. Grooming requirements for a Swissy are not extensive—brushing once or twice a week is usually sufficient to keep shedding of the coat under control. The GSMD undercoat, however, will shed significantly on a seasonal basis and may require additional attention at these times.

## **The GSMD in the Home**

The GSMD is a very social dog that thrives on being integrated into its family's life and home. To separate a Swissy from everyday "around the house" activities is a waste of a GSMD's rich and affectionate personality.

Each individual GSMD is different, but as a breed, Swissies tend to take to housetraining slowly. With consistent instruction by its owner, a Swissy will usually grasp the general concept of housetraining within a week or two of arriving at its new home, but will not be completely reliable in the house until many months later. Patience and consistency are essential for the successful housetraining of a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog.

Swissies seem to have a higher incidence of urinary incontinence than some other breeds. A GSMD with incontinence is not resisting house training. This is a medical condition that requires veterinary attention and treatment.

## **Swissy Activities and Activity Levels**

It is important for a GSMD to have regular exercise. Given the dog's substantial size, structure and body type, however, moderation is definitely called for. Intense, high-impact activities—like chasing after a bicycle—are definitely a bad idea for a breed such as this, and owners should be especially cautious that young dogs with rapidly developing skeletal structures are not overworked or overexerted. Be sure to discuss appropriate exercise levels for your growing Swissy with your breeder and your veterinarian.

As multi-purpose working dogs, Swissies thrive on having a job to do. There are many different activities that GSMDs may enjoy with their owners when they are sufficiently mature, including hiking, carting, obedience trials, herding, weight pulling, and backpacking.

## **Character and Temperament of the GSMD**

The GSMD is described in its AKC breed standard as a "bold, faithful and willing worker." By "bold," it is meant that the ideal Swissy temperament is robust and confident. Because the Swissy is a big dog with a characteristically "big" personality, it is imperative that the members of a GSMD's human family are regarded as its leaders, and that this is established when the dog is still young. A GSMD will grow to a considerable size and strength level at a relatively early age. It is necessary that a dog of this size, strength of will, and strength of body be secure and comfortable with its place in the family hierarchy. If the owner is not established in a leadership position, the dog will gladly take over that role—an ill-advised situation that can potentially lead to serious problems.

## **Socialization and Training**

It is essential that GSMD puppies receive extensive socialization, allowing them to be comfortable and confident in a wide variety of situations. Puppy Kindergarten classes are excellent places for pups to develop social skills with other dogs and people.

The mastery of basic obedience commands is vital for a dog of this size and strength. Participation in obedience classes can help provide a firm foundation of training. GSMDs respond well to training methods that are consistent, intelligent, fair, and firm, but not harsh.



## Health

Health concerns which exist in the general canine population, such as eye abnormalities, cancer, and epilepsy, are also present in the GSMD breed. In addition, Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs may be affected by many of the same problems common to other large and giant breeds. These include internal conditions such as gastric and splenic torsions, and orthopedic conditions including hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, and OCD of the shoulder. A concern somewhat unique to the breed is splenic torsion. It is important that you consult with your veterinarian and your breeder regarding these health issues, as well as dietary and exercise requirements for your Swissy pup.

Gastric torsion—also known as gastric dilation-volvulus or "bloat"—is a condition that involves a dog's stomach filling with air or gas and then rotating within the abdominal cavity, cutting off blood flow and displacing other organs in the process. Although the causes of "bloat" are not well understood, it is clear that this is a veterinary emergency that may result in death unless treatment is administered quickly. All Swissy owners should discuss this condition with their vets and breeders.

The GSMD was originally bred to live and work in the alpine regions of Switzerland. Because of the breed's characteristic large size, black color and thick undercoat, Swissies do not tolerate high temperatures well. If exercised for prolonged periods in hot, sunny conditions, a GSMD can fall prey to heat prostration or heatstroke. During the summer months, walks and other exercise should be planned for either early or late in the day, avoiding the hottest midday hours. A Swissy should have a sheltered place to escape from the heat of the day, and in some areas the only suitable daytime refuge may be inside an air-conditioned house.

## Swissies and Children

Swissies usually enjoy the attention and company of youngsters if they are properly socialized with children when they are puppies...and if the children are properly instructed to treat the dog with care and respect. It would be uncharacteristic for a properly socialized GSMD to purposely harm a child. However, young children should never be left unsupervised with a large dog of ANY breed, as the consequences of an accident are certainly not worth the risk. Additionally, due to its size, a Swissy can easily knock a small child down without even being aware of what has happened.

## Breeding

Conscientious Greater Swiss Mountain Dog breeders are dedicated to the improvement and welfare of the breed. They commit themselves to developing a working knowledge of GSMD pedigrees and the official AKC breed standard. Many of these breeders exhibit their dogs in conformation shows and engage in performance activities in an effort to evaluate their dogs in relation to the breed standard and to maintain the breed's traditional working abilities.

Responsible breeders also utilize health registries and other organizations (such as OFA, PennHIP, and CERF) to screen their dogs for genetic problems. Finally, conscientious breeders take great care in placing puppies and maintain an active concern for the well being of each dog they produce for its entire lifetime.

An owner's decision to breed his or her dog can have serious, long lasting consequences for the resulting animals, their respective breeds, and the pet population in general. Unless you plan to take on the considerable responsibilities involved in showing or breeding your GSMD, there is no reason for your male or female Swissy to be left intact. Spaying or neutering eliminates or greatly reduces the chances of a number of health problems and will also tend to make the training and behavior management of your Swissy considerably less complicated. Most importantly, you will be absolutely certain that your dog will not contribute to the vast number of unwanted pets euthanized each year at animal shelters and humane societies across the country.

## The Greater Swiss Mountain Dog Club of America

The GSMDCA is a member club of the American Kennel Club and the recognized AKC parent club for the breed. Becoming a member of the GSMDCA is the best way to continue to learn about the GSMD and to make contact with owners and breeders who are committed to the breed's preservation and improvement.

The club promotes responsible breeding practices, supports veterinary research, and fosters the preservation of the breed's working heritage through performance events. In addition, GSMDRescue offers assistance to Swissies in need of new homes.

GSMDCA members receive the club's quarterly newsletter and are kept informed about news and events pertaining to the Greater Swiss Mountain Dog.

**For additional information, visit GSMDCA's Web site [www.gsmdca.org](http://www.gsmdca.org)  
For membership questions, email [membership@gsmdca.org](mailto:membership@gsmdca.org)  
For general club questions, emails can be directed to [info@gsmdca.org](mailto:info@gsmdca.org)**

