

## Data Packet 2C: St. Bernard and Molosser Breeds

reduced text and reformatted layout from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Bernard\\_\(dog\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Bernard_(dog)) and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molosser>

The **St. Bernard** is a breed of very large working dog from the Italian and Swiss Alps, originally bred for rescue. The breed has become famous through tales of alpine rescues, as well as for its enormous size.

### Appearance

The St. Bernard is a giant dog. The average weight of the breed is between 140 and 264 lb. (64–120 kg) or more and the approximate height is 27½ inches to 35½ inches (70 to 90 cm).

The coat can be either smooth or rough, with the smooth coat close and flat. The rough coat is dense but flat, and more profuse around the neck and legs. The coat is typically a red color with white, or sometimes a mahogany brindle with white. Black shading is usually found on the face and ears. The tail is long and heavy, hanging low eyes should have naturally tight lids, with "haws only slightly visible". The eyes are usually brown, but sometimes can be icy blue.

St. Bernard



St. Bernard

<b>Other names</b>	St. Bernhardshund Bernhardiner Alpine Mastiff (archaic)
<b>Nicknames</b>	Saint
<b>Country of origin</b>	Italy / Switzerland
<b>Traits</b>	[hide]
<b>Classification and standards</b>	[show]
Dog ( <i>Canis lupus familiaris</i> )	

St. Bernards were exported to England in the mid-19th century, where they were bred with mastiffs to create an even larger dog. Plinlimmon, a famous St. Bernard of the time, was measured at 95 kg (210 lbs.) and 87.5 cm (34<sup>5</sup> in), and was sold to an American for \$7000.<sup>[9]</sup> Commercial pressure encouraged breeding ever-larger dogs until "the dogs became so gross that they had difficulties in getting from one end of a show ring to another". An 1895 *New York Times* report mentions a St. Bernard named Major F. measuring 8 feet 6 inches (2.59 m) in length, who, if the claims were true, would be the longest dog in history. Another St. Bernard named Benedictine V Schwarzwald Hof (Pierson, Michigan - USA) also reached 315 lb. (143 kg), which earned a place in the 1981 edition of the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

### Behavior

St. Bernards, like all very large dogs, must be well socialized with people and other dogs in order to prevent fearfulness and any possible aggression or territoriality. The biggest threat to small children is being knocked over by this breed's larger size.

Overall they are a loyal and affectionate breed, and if socialized are very friendly. While generally not as aggressive as dogs bred for protection, a St. Bernard may bark at strangers, and their size makes them good deterrents against possible intruders.

### History of the St. Bernard

The earliest written records of the St. Bernard breed are from monks at the hospice at the *Great St Bernard Pass* in 1707, with paintings and drawings of the dog dating even earlier.

The name "St. Bernard" originates from the *Great St Bernard Hospice*, a traveler's hospice on the often treacherous *St. Bernard Pass* in the *Western Alps* between *Switzerland* and *Italy*. The pass, the lodge, and the dogs are named for *Bernard of Menthon*, the 11th century monk who established the station.

"St. Bernard" wasn't in widespread use until the middle of the 19th century. The dogs were called "Saint Dogs", "Noble Steeds", "Alpenmastiff", or "Barry Dogs" before that time.

The most famous St. Bernard to save people at the pass was [Barry](#) (sometimes spelled Berry), who reportedly saved somewhere between 40 and 100 lives. There is a monument to Barry in the [Cimetière des Chiens](#), and his body was preserved in the [Natural History Museum](#) in [Berne](#).

The dogs never received any special training from the monks. Instead, younger dogs would learn how to perform search and rescue operations from older dogs.<sup>[8]</sup>

The classic St. Bernard looked very different from the St. Bernard of today because of crossbreeding. Severe winters from 1816 to 1818 led to increased numbers of avalanches, killing many of the dogs used for breeding while they were performing rescues. In an attempt to preserve the breed, the remaining St. Bernards were crossed with [Newfoundlands](#) brought from the [Colony of Newfoundland](#) in the 1850s, and so lost much of their use as rescue dogs in the snowy climate of the alps because the long fur they inherited would freeze and weigh them down.

## Ancestors of the St. Benard – Moloser Dog Breeds

The ancestors of the St. Bernard share a history with the [Sennenhunds](#), also called Swiss Mountain Dogs or Swiss Cattle Dogs, the large [farm dogs](#) of the farmers and dairymen of the [livestock guardians](#), [herding dogs](#), and [draft dogs](#) as well as [hunting dogs](#), [search and rescue dogs](#), and [watchdogs](#). These dogs are thought to be descendants of [molosser type](#) dogs brought into the Alps by the ancient Romans, and the St. Bernard is recognized internationally today as one of the Molossoid breeds.

**Molosser** is a [category](#) of solidly built, large [dog breeds](#) that all descend from the same [common ancestor](#). The name derives from [Molossia](#) an area of ancient [Epirus](#), where the large shepherd dog was known as a [Molossus](#). Molossers typically have heavy bones, pendant ears, a relatively short and well-muscled neck, and a [short muzzle](#).



A Fila Brasileiro, showing the typical molosser build.

The oldest known record of a Molosser-type dog is found in its name, which is the namesake of the people who first used these dogs: the [ancient Greek](#) tribe of [Mollosians](#) in [Epirus](#) (between Greece and Albania). The people of Epirus were a seafaring people and these dogs sailed with their masters to [Asia](#), where [selective breeding](#) gave them multiple [phenotypes](#) that were better suited to their new [climates](#) and [roles](#).

As these ancient Molosser dogs were exported to [West Asia](#), [Central Asia](#), [South Asia](#), and [North Africa](#), they soon adapted to their surroundings and interbred with local dogs resulting in offspring with shorter, differently colored [coats](#) but retained more anatomical [morphology](#) traits like height and massive heads with short muzzles.

The dogs were considered valuable in [Babylon](#), and are mentioned in [cuneiform](#) in the 4th century BC. A large mastiff-like dog is shown on the ancient [terra cotta](#) by [Birs Nimrud](#). The dog is 90 centimeters (35 in) tall at the [withers](#), has a stocky head and powerful hindquarters. The dogs were used for hunting in ancient [Assyria](#). Archeological digs of the [Ashurbanipal](#) palace (7th century BC) revealed pictures of dogs felling [wild horses](#) and [donkeys](#). Assyrian mastiffs were also used for military purposes and for protection.

The ancient mastiffs would later be imported from Assyria and Babylon to [Egypt](#) and [Asia Minor](#). [Xerxes I of Persia](#) led predatory wars to enlarge the borders of his empire, taking with him large [war dogs](#) in his

Army. Mastiffs were used to fight in the Roman amphitheater against lions and may have been used in lion hunting. They are the roots of many Shepherd and Mountain dog breeds.

## **Health**

The very fast growth rate and the weight of a St. Bernard can lead to very serious deterioration of the bones if the dog does not get proper food and exercise.

Many dogs are genetically affected by hip dysplasia or elbow dysplasia. Osteosarcoma (bone cancer) has been shown to be hereditary in the breed.

They are susceptible to eye disorders called entropion and ectropion, in which the eyelid turns in or out. The breed standard indicates that this is a major fault. The breed is also susceptible to epilepsy and seizures, a heart disease called dilated cardiomyopathy, and eczema.