

An Expert's Guide to the TIBETAN MASTIFF

By Juliette Cunliffe



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Front cover photo is a 17th century painting of a Tibetan Mastiff, by an unknown artist.

CONTENTS

Introduction		3
Chapter 1	The Tibetan Mastiff in History	6
Chapter 2	Meet the Modern Tibetan Mastiff	17
Chapter 3	Finding Your Puppy	23
Chapter 4	Your Puppy Comes Home	30
Chapter 5	Training	35
Chapter 6	Essential Care	40
Chapter 7	Grooming	43
Chapter 8	Studying the Breed Standard	46
Chapter 9	Showing a Tibetan Mastiff	49
Chapter 10	Health Care	55

CREDITS

All photos by Carol Ann Johnson & Juliette Cunliffe
www.carolannjohnson.com
and from the Author's archive collection

INTRODUCTION



As many readers of will perhaps know, I am already a well-established author with over 50 dog books published in hardback, many of them also with editions in different languages. There are several in German and Spanish, and one has even appeared in Russian, so it may come as some surprise that I have decided to publish a series of EBooks. Let me explain why...

I am a Championship Show judge of several breeds and often when officiating abroad people have asked if I have any of my books with me for them to buy. The answer is generally "No" as books are heavy to carry and I rarely keep a stock of them at home. In some countries I know dog lovers simply thirst for books, but they can be difficult to get hold of in places where canine titles are low on the scale of publisher's priorities.

But in these days of internet technology, most things seem possible, and I hope that through this book, and others that will follow in the series, I am able to share my knowledge with fellow dog lovers throughout the world. In an EBook there is no weight, and therefore no high postage charges, and with no printing fees costs can be kept to a minimum, so it is a 'win win' situation for all of us.

Even in countries where dog books are readily available, often the book you want is not in stock. You can order it, yes, but that takes time and if you are trying to forge ahead with research about the breed you wish to obtain there is great benefit in buying on-line and receiving your book without delay.

This also means that this EBook is a perfect purchase for those who have just acquired their new puppy. Obviously owners should have read as much as possible about a breed before reaching that stage, but they may have just borrowed books from a library and it is essential always to keep breed information readily at hand.

In no way am I suggesting that having an EBook means that you should not also have at least one good hard-back book about your breed. Nothing, in my view, can compare with the feel of a book as you lovingly turn the pages, year after year. But then I am a book collector, and I realise that not everyone feels the same way as I do. I now live in Nepal and brought almost my entire library over here by air-freight – that's how much I love books!

But compiling an EBook gives an author total control over its content. I have worked with some great publishers over decades, but sometimes they are not 'dog people', so although there is never any issue with verbal content, there can sometimes be differences of opinion as to the photos my books contain. In this respect I am fortunate enough to work with one of the world's most renowned canine photographers, Carol Ann Johnson, whose photos will pack the following pages. Added to these are some from my own personal archives, including some extremely rare images you may not have seen before.

A few photos included here have been taken with my camera when I have been judging abroad; I am grateful to all concerned, especially Sanne Rutloh at the Tibetan Breeds World Show in Sweden.

So here I leave you to absorb the pages that follow. At the close of the book you will find a list of some hard copy books that you may like to obtain in the future.

Enjoy!

Juliette Cunliffe - 2012

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The Tibetan Mastiff in History

The Tibetan Mastiff has an ancient background and this breed is believed to lie behind many other breeds we know today. Some say this is possibly the very oldest of all large dogs. The Tibetan Mastiff gained almost legendary status over the centuries, few westerners having ever seen the breed, but stories about them found their way back from early travellers to Tibet.

In 1271, the renowned traveller, Marco Polo, embarked on a journey that made history. It was from his account of his travels that we have the first documented evidence of the great dog of Tibet. He first encountered such dogs in China's Szchuan province, the dogs accompanying Tibetan traders.



*Marco Polo returning from his travels
with his Tibetan Mastiff*

He recounted that every man on a journey took a couple of these dogs with him, so bold and fierce were they that two could attack a lion. Here, though, I should clarify that the 'lions' to which he referred were actually tigers, the words for tigers, leopards and lions often being interchanged in Asia.

He also said the Tibetan Mastiff's voice was as powerful as that of a lion.

It has perplexed many that Polo described these dogs as being 'the size of donkeys' but donkeys in that region are much smaller than those we know in the west. Indeed even this year I have come into contact with a Tibetan Refugee who had dogs when a nomad in Tibet and he immediately described them as being as big as donkeys. That said, from my many meetings with Tibetans I know for sure that there are many Tibetan Mastiffs in Tibet that are much larger than those with which we are familiar in the western showing. Several different Tibetan people have described these dogs as standing about 91.5cms (36 ins) at shoulder, some 25.5 cms (10 ins) taller than the minimum height required for a male, according to the English Kennel Club's breed standard.

Tibet is known fondly as 'The Roof of the World', a mystical country with barren landscape. The country's dogs,

like its people, have to be able to deal with extremes of temperature, fiercely bright light and high altitude, the majority living between 3200 and 5000 metres.



All the dogs of this region have to be sufficiently hardy to survive in the inhospitable terrain. Certainly for the Tibetan Mastiff, living as it has done in isolated communities, it has been a matter of 'survival of the fittest'. Weak dogs would simply not have been reared beyond puppyhood.



*Top:
Three nomads
with their dogs,
on the author's
approach to
Lhasa*

*Left:
A woman with
her Tibetan
Mastiff puppy,
photographed
by Juliette
Cunliffe when
en route
overland to
Lhasa*

As the centuries moved forward, the British sent missions to Tibet in the hope of establishing trade relations and in 1774 we have another vivid description of the breed. This came from George Bogle, who was sent to Tibet by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of Bengal. The dogs he saw were large and 'shagged like a lion', and they were extremely fierce. Bogle also gave us an insight into the manner in which the Tibetan Mastiffs were kept, chained during the day and let loose at night, a tradition which is continued today. After all, the Tibetan Mastiff is a protector and it is sensible to allow him to roam free at night when the household is sleeping, and when both domestic livestock and humans need to be guarded from predators and human intruders.



*Later, in 1897, Strebel used this example
as the ideal Thibet dog*

A second British mission was launched to Tibet in 1783 and again from this we learn of the Tibetan Mastiff. On the border of Tibet and Bhutan, two large dogs protected a herd of around 300 yaks. The dogs were apparently huge, and not only

tremendously fierce, but also strong and noisy. They were also observed as guardians of the home, with comment that these dogs were so furious that it was unsafe to approach unless their keepers were close.

The report of this mission is particularly absorbing, for in Bhutan a row of wooden cages is described, in each of which was a massive dog, such as those that had been seen in Tibet.

It is interesting to compare the figures given above with my recent discussions with the Tibetan nomad I mentioned earlier, who left Tibet in 1964. His family used two Tibetan Mastiffs with fifteen to sixteen horses to control between 2,000 and 3,000 sheep and goats and 50 to 60 yaks. Clearly Tibetan Mastiffs are perfectly capable of controlling enormous herds.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the nineteenth century there was an increasing flow of British people to Asia and more than one zoologist or adventurer found their way into this magical country, from where they reported on the dogs they had seen. In 1845 Joseph Dalton Hooker, who also went into southern Tibet, wrote of his meeting with a noble-looking black Tibetan Mastiff. Its gloriously bushy tail was thrown over its back in a majestic sweep, and around its neck it wore a thick collar of scarlet wool.



A Tibetan Mastiff in Tibet wearing a traditional yak wool collar

This is still used traditionally in Tibet and the Himalayan regions. The idea behind the use of this collar was to denote a fearsome and dangerous dog, but by some it is now used also as an ornament and helps to give them an even more majestic and imposing demeanour.

Increasing interest was shown in the breed in Himalayan regions and in 1847 Lord Hardinge, who was then Viceroy of India, sent one, named Bout, to Queen Victoria in England, although there is no record of any breedings.



Siring