Step-In Registration

The English Shepherd Club Registry includes a step-in registration program. Section 6 of the registry rules states: "The Step In process offers a means of recognizing and registering purebred English Shepherds who lack, for whatever reason, the documentation required to qualify for full registration."

The step-in process was created to fit the ES's unique breed history: it is both a standardized breed (with four separate registries) and a landrace breed found in geographic pockets across the continent. Registry founders felt that there were likely to be purebred dogs, valuable to the breed, which were unregistered or incompletely registered. Step-in provides an avenue by which these dogs can rejoin the registered population and contribute genetic diversity to the breed. Note that the goal is to include only purebred English Shepherds – a clear distinction from grading-up programs to fold cross-bred dogs into the registry as is done in some livestock breeds.

Applications for the step-in process are available from the ESC Registrar. If an application is submitted, the Registrar cross-checks the application against Registry records to see if any of the dog's relatives have already been registered. With this context, the Registrar refers it to the Registry's Step-In Committee.

The Step-In committee then reviews the application relative to three areas: (1) known pedigree and links to the historically-documented and registered population; (2) working character; and (3) physical type.

(1) Pedigree – Does this dog link up to the historical breed and breeders? This is the most important yet most variable element. Some applicant dogs may be unregistered yet have a well known pedigree which includes links to historically-known lines and breeders. Other applicant dogs have a scattering of registered ancestors from different registries but less overall information. As well as pedigree, bills of sale, letters and other documents are important additions to the application.

(2) Working Character – Does the dog work like an ES? The Working Trait Evaluation (WTE) in the application helps owners think through and evaluate their dog for the English Shepherd's historic working traits: herding drive, herding style, power, stock ethic, work ethic, biddability, approach, "eye," bark, and bite. Videos are an especially effective way to show a dog's approach to its work, and they are encouraged. Herding instinct results and other third party measures are also relevant. The application also includes an opportunity for owners to describe the dog's working environment and its other traits, such as territoriality, patrolling, warning, defense of people and property, tracking ability, approach toward predators, pest control, and attitude toward newborn livestock.

(3) Physical Type – Does the dog fit ES type? The application should demonstrate that the dog fits within the breed standard as described in the English Shepherd Club by-laws. This is evaluated via photographs of the dog from several angles. It may also be apparent from videos.

The committee studies the application and may request additional information from the applicant. If the committee accepts the application, the dog is approved at one of three step-in levels, based on the depth of the pedigree: one complete generation = Level 1; two complete generations = Level 2; three or more complete generations = Level 3. Dogs which are approved are given registration numbers appended with S1, S2, or S3 to indicate the level approved. If a person is looking at a dog in the ESCR database, the number ESC-XXX-S3 indicates a step in dog at Level 3 with three complete generations known.

The committee is currently comprised of seven members appointed by the Board of Directors, each bringing his or her own diversity of experience with the breed. Members are also chosen for their objectivity. It is recommended that members of the Step-In Committee have a minimum of five years experience in the breed and that both breeders and those with experience in working dogs are represented. The Registrar is a non-voting member of the committee.

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