

East German Shepherd vs West German Shepherd: Origins

German Shepherds were first registered as a breed in 1901 after the breed creator Max von Stephanitz picked up a dog from a dog show in 1899 that he believed possessed all the traits and characteristics he was looking for to create the 'ideal working dog'.

After WWII in 1945, Germany was divided into East Germany (which later became the DDR – Deutsche Demokratische Republik) and West Germany.

Around this period of the war ending, the German Shepherd breed came close to dying out because of the few resources even for humans, let alone animals.

However, the respective German Governments, which officially became separate East and West states around 1949, took over the breed registration and regulation of the breed.

The East German government had the strictest regulations in place, putting a focus on breeding dogs with a hard edge working ability to work with the East German military.

These dogs had incredibly healthy DNA (dogs with health issues like hip and elbow problems weren't allowed to breed), great physical attributes, and excellent stamina and focus to work.

West Germany developed both show lines and working lines.

The show lines were visually attractive, with a focus on appearance and show ring conformance according to the German SV standard. They also had to pass health, temperament and working ability standards.

The working lines were bred more for their working ability – in particular working with the East German military and law enforcement. But, they also had a stable temperament as a companion.

The West German working lines are thought to be the closest bloodline to the original German Shepherd breed standard.

East German Shepherd vs West German Shepherd: Differences + Similarities

West German Show Line

- Originally bred in West Germany – mainly for appearance and show conformance
- Had to meet health, temperament and working standards
- Some people think these are most beautiful in appearance of all the lines
- Mostly Black and red saddles/coats – but also come in colors of black and tan, sable, bi-colors and black.
- Angle of back and hindquarters isn't as extreme as American show line, but is more than the East German working lines
- Slightly smaller in height and length than American lines

- More working drive than American lines
- Better health than American lines
- Less athleticism and less of a working edge than East German and West German working lines

West German Working Line

- Originally bred in West Germany mainly for working ability
- Thought to be the closest in appearance, temperament, working ability and companionship qualities to the original German Shepherds
- Good balance between working drive and ability, and temperament to be a companion dog/pet
- Coats and saddle colors are somewhere between West German show lines and East German working lines i.e. they are black and red or black and tan, but possess more black and dark pigmentation than West German Show lines
- Angle of back and hindquarters is similar to West German show lines
- More working drive and edge, and athleticism than West German show lines
- Less hard edge and more stable temperament away from working applications than East German working lines

East German/DDR Working Line

- Originally bred in East Germany mainly for hard edge working ability
- dark pigmentation/saddle/coat – mostly black or sable with tinges of tan on the feet or on the legs or in the face/around the ears > darker than any other line
- a large blocky head, and thicker paws than show lines
- thick chests
- Most athletic of all the bloodlines
- hard edge working temperament, intelligent and great stamina – were bred mainly to work with the East German military and support squads
- thick bone structure – more muscle and less fat than show lines
- straighter backs than any of the West German lines
- Weren't bred to be a household pet