

Heidi, hi!

You might remember our November 2013 cover girl, a Miniature American Shepherd Dog, who left many wanting to know more...

Three years ago I went to Crufts, as I usually do, with two friends. I knew that one of them, Fran Aibisser, was hoping to import two dogs from America, but to be honest I hadn't taken that much interest - it seemed a very ambitious project.

So there we were, watching the agility, when I saw the most gorgeous little dog. When I remarked on it, Fran laughed and told me that it was the same breed she was planning on importing - the Miniature American Shepherd Dog. I had never heard of it!

On the way home, Fran showed me pictures of the dogs she was planning to fly over. They looked lovely and I was smitten. I wanted one. She was to be a long time coming!

Fran went to a lot of trouble researching lines and health of her chosen breed, and, in due course, two pups travelled from the US to Fran's home country, Switzerland, where she was to live with them until they were old enough to travel to the UK.

Unfortunately, the pups had not been well socialised, and, despite her best efforts, Fran realised that they simply were not suitable to form the foundation of her breeding stock. With a heavy heart, she set about finding them good pet homes in Switzerland and, with typical determination, she started from scratch.

I've known Fran since the day she arrived in this country at the age of 19. Once she sets her heart on something, nothing will stop her. She went back to the drawing board, researching European lines, and eventually found her first two Mini Americans in Switzerland and Germany - black tricolor Mac and blue merle Yana.

Fran brought the pups up in Switzerland until they were old enough for her to bring them over. And then I met the two puppies who would, we hoped, one day produce a litter of their own.

Worth the wait

It did, of course, take a while! But on 7 May this year, Yana gave birth to a litter of five beautiful puppies. The only possible colours that could be produced from the combination of Mac and Yana's genes were black tri, red tri, red merle and blue merle.

Weighing up my own current dogs, I decided I wanted a bitch. I didn't want a merle, but wasn't fussed otherwise. So I waited for news like the proverbial expectant father, and was kept updated by texts from a very excited Fran and her two experienced midwives.

The final tally was four boys and one girl - a beautiful red tri with a lovely white blaze. As soon as I saw her, I fell in love. I nicknamed her Blaze, despite Fran's protestations that such a name was only suitable for a carthorse.

I saw and held Heidi and her siblings for the first time when they were just five days old, and visited regularly. Watching and playing with them took up an awful lot of time!

Fran was a fantastic breeder, introducing the pups to all sorts of experiences, textures, noises, people and toys. Later, she set up a wonderful kindergarten in her garden, complete with toys, tunnels, wobble board and toddler slide.

Heidi came home with me in July and has been a delight, although my husband has taken to calling her Squiggle, a great description! It's been a long time since I've had such a young puppy - all my dogs since 1995 having been older rescues.

But what is a Miniature American Shepherd Dog? Most of us are familiar with the

Australian Shepherd, a KC-recognised pastoral breed that, despite its name, is as American as the stars and stripes. For some time breeders have been breeding smaller specimens to obtain the Miniature Australian Shepherd, a breed not recognised by any registry. The American Kennel Club has now agreed that minis can be registered under the new name of Miniature American Shepherd Dogs, should their breeders so wish. FCI and British Kennel Club recognition will hopefully follow, but the wheels do grind exceedingly slowly.

Confused? Well, so am I, in all honesty, but I don't really mind what my dog is called. If people show interest and are up to speed on dog matters, I'll explain what she is; if not, I just say she is a miniature sheepdog! ☺



Photo © Fran Aibisser

You can find out more about the breed, and about Fran's pack, at www.basileas-minis.com