

Unforgettable Breeders

who helped build the foundation of the Australian Shepherd breed



PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH

Linda Wilson

Briarbrook

Paula McDermid

Linda Wilson

Briarbrook

Established 1965

Tell me about your first Aussie.

The first Australian Shepherds I ever saw belonged to a man at a rodeo/horse show in the mid-60s. I was riding my mare, getting her ready for pleasure, and I saw a man climb up on the front of his pickup that had an over-the-roof camper on it. There were three doors. He opened up the doors and three of the ugliest dogs I had ever seen ran down the windshield, across the hood of the pickup, jumped to the ground, and started running around. They were blue merle Aussies that had spots everywhere. I didn't find them attractive.

A few years went by and I saw my next Australian Shepherd. This dog was a blue merle female, and she was going to horse shows with a well-known horse trainer. This dog was pretty, she was smart and very well-trained. I found those qualities to be very desirable. When my pet German Shepherd dog passed away, I decided to get an Australian Shepherd. My first Aussie had a bad temperament, so I returned it, and started looking for a better Aussie.

I decided that I wanted a dog that was SMART, was loyal, and was pretty. I did not want a dog that I had to adjust my life to so it would be able to tolerate life. I wanted a normal dog that would go with me where ever I went



Linda Wilson with Kimber Shields handling BIS BISS AKC Bronze GCH Briarbrooks Copyright ROM-III to Best of Breed at Westminster in 2009. Born 2002. Sire of 75 champions. By AKC CH Briarbrooks Silver Medallion ROMX-III x AKC CH Briarbrooks Photo Credit. Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson. Photo credit: John Ashbey.



Briarbrook's foundation sire ASCA CH Fieldmaster's Three Ring Circus ASCA HOF. Born 1977. Sire of 53 Champions (an unmatched achievement in the 1980s). Sire of four ASCA National Specialty Best of Breed titleholders. Sire of nine ASCA Hall of Fame offspring. By ASCA CH Fieldmaster of Flintridge ASCA HOF x Whispering Pines of Flintridge.

and behave in a friendly, non-aggressive manner. I searched through many Aussies looking for dogs to begin a breeding program.

Have you had other breeds?

I had different breeds growing up as pets. My father had pointers and setters for field trial dogs and for hunting. A few hours before my birth, my father had a litter of puppies that my mother had not seen. On her way to the hospital she had to go see the new litter. I guess I was born into dogs!

Did your experience with horses add to your knowledge about dogs?

I had a great love for horses, and when I was 10 years old I got my first horse for my birthday. I learned a lot from horses. My first horse was a rough-riding horse. That's when I learned my first lesson on structure. I was told why he was rough—he did not have enough angles to his pasterns. Pasterns are shock absorbers. They let the horse's feet hit the ground more smoothly. I learned my lesson—my next horse was smooth-riding!

Through horses, I learned about the relationship between shoulders and length of hip and how they are set—not high, not low. How the neck ties into the back. The neck set and layback of the withers in relation to the shoulder. To have a high wither is desirable in a horse, not a mutton (rounded) wither (saddles don't stay on well)!

I had a top-winning mare that was a state champion prior to the existence of the world show/congress shows. At the Missouri state banquet year-end

awards, the guest speaker was expert horseman Marvin Beeman, DVM, from Colorado. He talked about form as it relates to function. I learned so much from his lecture and will be forever grateful to him.

By this time we had show horses and running quarter horses. I watched horses running and how they carried themselves. I saw that the best horses skim the ground. A horse that runs up in the air loses the race because this is wasted motion—they are running upwards instead of going forward. All of this relates to good movement in dogs as well. I have always had an eye for a good horse and a good dog.

As I went along in dogs I wanted to know why a dog moved the way it did. When I judged Australian Shepherds in ASCA, I developed a system to judge all dogs with equal interest. When the class came in and was stacked, I would decide who was going to be the best moving dog. After they all moved around, if my intuition was correct I gave myself an “A.”

But if my eye was wrong and a dog moved better than I thought it would, then I had to study that dog to see where I was wrong. Or equally, if it didn't move as well as I expected, I again had to re-evaluate what I was seeing. Movement always tells reality. If a dog moves right—it is RIGHT, and the eye has to learn more.



AKC CH Briarbrooks Valedictorian ROMX-III. Born 1992. AKC all-time leading sire in the breed with 103 champions. By BISS AKC ASCA CH My Main Man of Heatherhill ROM-III ASCA HOF x AKC ASCA CH Briarbrooks Silver Sequence ROM-III.
Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson.

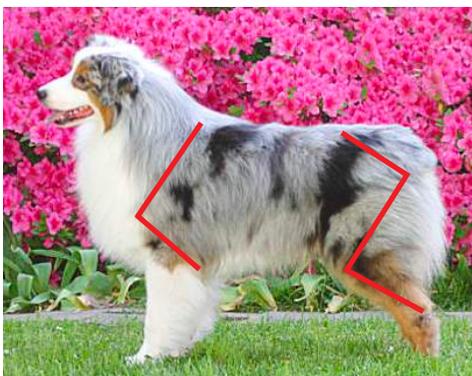
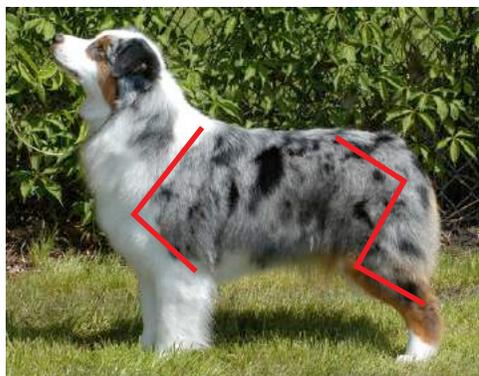
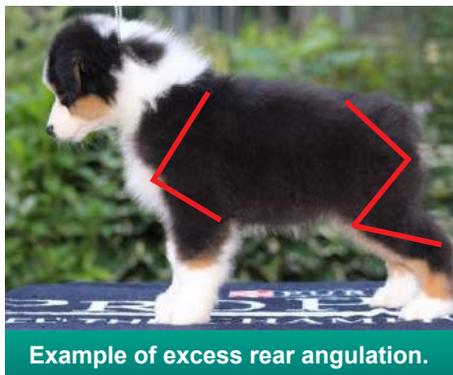
Over the years, what fads have you seen in the breed?

There are three things that I'd like to talk about: angulation, size and proportions, and balance.

Angulation

When I first got into the breed, most Australian Shepherds were OVER ANGULATED in the rear and had straight/steep shoulders. This caused the dogs to overreach/overdrive/crab in their movement. This was caused by the bend of the stifle being up higher on the leg, and the leg being set too far under the dog. Steep croups also added to this problem.

TODAY the breed still has a problem with rear angulation, but for a different reason. The stifle is too long with the bend being too low to the ground, causing the rear to be camped out too far behind the dog. The dog loses



Examples of two well-balanced Aussies with correct angulation front and rear.

These photos with red lines drawn on them are a tool for education, not a crutch.

There will not be a dog or puppy in your backyard or at a dog show with red lines on them. You must learn to look through the coat at the structure underneath. YOU can train your eye to see it. If I feel a dog it is only to confirm what my eye has told me. NOT to tell my eye what it sees.

support of his rear as his rear legs are set too far back. When the dog moves it can't hold up for the long run. The dog's movement falls apart as the dog tires out from working so hard to support his body mass. Beware of this dog stacked up for the judge—it can look good if one does not understand structure faults.

In the 70s (I think) at horse sales it became a fad to measure a potential race horse to determine its future success as a race horse. But the same horse could be measured by several different people with different outcomes on its speed index rating. Likewise in dogs its the same—it depends how the dog is measured.



BIS BISS AKC Bronze GCH Briarbrooks Copyright ROM-III. Born 2002. Sire of 75 Champions. By AKC CH Briarbrooks Silver Medallion ROMX-III x AKC CH Briarbrooks Photo Credit. Photos courtesy of Linda Wilson. Photo credit: Garden Studio.

Size and proportions

According to the AKC Australian Shepherd breed standard, “He is well balanced, slightly longer than tall, of medium size and bone, with coloring that offers variety and individuality.” When I started showing, there were many dogs being shown that were taller than the breed standard’s preferred size of 20” to 23”. There is no disqualification for dogs above 23”. From the USASA breed standard: “The preferred height for males 20”-23”, females 18”-21”. Quality is not to be sacrificed in favor of size.”

I see the Australian Shepherd being faulted and discriminated against even at the higher end of the preferred range within the standard; The trend seems to be the SMALLER the better. We are not the Miniature American Shepherd Dog. I do not want to shrink Australian Shepherds. Our breed standard is a description of an Australian Shepherd compared to ALL breeds of dogs—from Chihuahua to Irish Wolfhound. It does not mean comparing one Australian Shepherd to another Australian Shepherd. When the breed standard says a medium-sized dog, it is in comparison to all breeds of dogs.

MBIS BISS AKC CH Briarbrooks I’m Too Sexy. Born 2002. Winner of seven AKC All-breed Bests In Show. Best in Specialty Show winner, 71 Group Firsts. By MBIS AKC CH Briarbrooks Turning Point x AKC CH Briarbrooks Material Girl. Photo courtesy of Sharon Fontanini.



Balance

The balanced Aussie moves like a well-oiled machine—it will be able to go all day long. BALANCE IS WHAT DETERMINES EFFICIENCY of a dog. If the front end and the back end are not balanced, and if the topline of the dog does not tie in well, you will have disordered and inefficient movement.

An Australian Shepherd is slightly longer in body than tall. Common structural faults are dogs who are low to the ground and too long in body for correct balance. A dog needs sufficient leg height to go with its body length to maintain correct balance. The other side of the coin is high on leg and short in body. A dog that is too high on leg and too short in body is equally unbalanced and incorrect.

What is your proudest moment when breeding and showing?

I've had many proud moments over the years. Most occur at home when I know I have produced a great dog, long before the dog ever hits the show ring, as I watch that next youngster gait around my yard effortlessly, so smooth and natural. I'm always proud of all the dogs that I have owned or bred or that I have sold who go out and make names for themselves.

I have owned/bred dogs that have competed and won at National Specialties: BOB, BOS, BOW, WD, WB, Best in Sweeps, and All-Breed Bests in Show and Best in Specialty shows. I have had four dogs that were BOB at Westminster, and many dogs ranked nationally in various years. There have been many Champions, many Grand Champions, sires and dams that were the leading producing dogs of the year. Many Register of Merit (ROM) qualifiers, including AKC ASCA CH Briarbrooks Silver Sequence ROM-III, who is the Top Producing Dam of all time, and her son AKC CH Briarbrooks Valedictorian ROM-III who is the AKC all-time leading sire of the breed.

AKC ASCA CH Briarbrooks Silver Sequence ROM-III. Born 1987. Ranked #1 in ASCA conformation standings 1989, 1990. Leading dam of 23 champions in AKC. Best of Opposite Sex 1992 USASA National Specialty. By ASCA CH Briarbrooks Coat of Arms x ASCA CH Shadowmere's Close To Midnight. Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson. Photo credit: Petrulis.



I appreciate all of the owners/handlers for their commitment to Briarbrook dogs, their expertise in conditioning, training and showing their dogs to fulfillment. I'm always proud of them.

Who had the most impact on your evolution as a breeder?

I have had the greatest impact on myself. The decisions that I have made are what have made Briarbrook Kennel known around the world.

In the early days, Marcia Hall (Bain) had faith in me and let me purchase ASCA CH Fieldmaster's Three Ring Circus "Bonzo." The first time I saw Bonzo he was a four-month old puppy, and I was not impressed with him at all. I told Marcia I did not like him. She told me she really liked him. The next time I saw Bonzo was the following spring in Las Vegas. Back then people let their dogs run loose to exercise them where the show was being held. Marcia turned her dogs loose one by one and they joined the group. I asked her who certain dogs were and she would tell me their names.

A stunning blue dog jumped out and I asked her who was THAT dog. She asked me which dog, so I pointed him out again. Marcia said, "Oh you don't like that dog." I said, "Yes I do like him!" She said, "That is BONZO." I looked at her and said, "Well, I guess I was wrong about him!" and we both laughed. That was the first time I tried to buy Bonzo. I told my ex-husband that if Bonzo was ever for sale I was going to buy him for whatever it takes. It took a year but Marcia finally let me buy him.



BIS AKC CH Briarbrooks Quicksilver.
Born 1996. Best of Breed 2003
Westminster Kennel Club. Number
One in Breed 2000. 22 Group 1st. 215
BOBs. By BISS AKC ASCA CH My
Main Man of Heatherhill ROM-III HOF
x AKC ASCA CH Briarbrooks Silver
Sequence ROM-III. Photo courtesy of
Linda Wilson. Photo credit: Meyer.

AKC GCH Briarbrooks
Zenyatta. Born 2010.
Winners Bitch and Best
of Winners 2013 USASA
National Specialty. By
BIS BISS AKC GCH
Briarbrooks Copyright
ROM-III x AKC CH
Briarbrooks Always
Decked Out. Photo
courtesy of Linda Wilson.



What was your greatest disappointment as a breeder?

There are many disappointments in breeding dogs. For all of the great and outstanding Briarbrook dogs that I have produced—that have won an incredible amount of accolades—there were as many disappointments as there was joy in accomplishments. Breeding dogs is very hard, very tough if you keep your standards high.

To what do you attribute your success?

Always striving for more. Making hard decisions. Not making excuses about a dog. Always being my dog's best friend. Learning about structure, so I would have a blueprint in my mind of what I want an Australian Shepherd to look like.

I was once asked by a man who successfully bred another breed of dog what I would want my perfect dog to look like. As I told him what I wanted my dog to look like, he just let me talk. When I finished, he told me he had asked many breeders that question over the years, and I was the only person who was able to answer it. He told me that it was no wonder why I was producing excellent dogs.

What was your game plan when you started breeding?

To breed a quality dog with a great temperament. That it must have uncanny brains and it must be willing to please (you can't have one without the other). A loyal dog that is the owner's dog first and foremost. A dog that is easy to train. A structurally correct dog that can move all day long, and that the dog is balanced. Plus, the icing on the cake, a beautiful dog, because you must also have breed type, and I like pretty. A dog that makes me say "WOW!" when I see him, "I'm glad I own you!"

I still have that feeling today as I watch my dogs move and see their beauty, even if they are out of coat. I see their balance that makes them outstanding.

What are the most important lessons you learned that you'd like to pass on to newer fanciers?

- A tough or hard decision on a particular dog is probably the right one. Don't kid yourself. A wrong decision will come back and bite you. You may have to live with that wrong or "easy" decision for generations.
- Aim for the top, not the middle.
- Everyone is going to make mistakes, just don't make the same one again.
- Study the pedigrees, not for the faults but for the positives. All dogs have faults. What makes one dog better than another are their *qualities*.

AKC CH Briarbrooks Silver
Anniversary ROM C-III. Born 1992.
Dam of 14 champions. By BISS
AKC ASCA CH My Main Man of
Heatherhill ROM X-I ROM C-III
ROM O-I ASCA HOF x AKC ASCA
CH Briarbrooks Silver Sequence
ROM-III. Photo courtesy of Linda
Wilson. Photo credit: Booth.



AKC GCH Briarbrooks Alleluia. Born 2004. WB BOW USASA National Specialty. Award Of Merit 2009 Westminster Kennel Club. By BIS BISS AKC Bronze GCH Briarbrooks Copyright ROM-III x AKC CH Briarbrooks Platinum By Design ROM-II. Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson.



- ASK yourself if you can double up on a quality. Breed away from faults while intensifying the quality.
- READ Rachel Page Elliots' ***Dog Steps*** until you understand basic movement. When you have that down, read McDowell Lyons' ***The Dog in Action***.
- I read and re-read ***Dog Steps*** until I thoroughly understood it. Then I started in on ***The Dog in Action***. I would read one chapter a night and would meditate on it the whole next day. And the next night I would read that same chapter again to see if I understood it. This took a long time, but I gained the knowledge I wanted.
- LEARN the parts of a dog. You can not have a thorough conversation about a dog until you know the parts of a dog.
- LEARN from breeders who are successful. If people's decisions didn't work for them, those decisions are not going to work for you.
- SEEK a mentor who has been successful in the breed for a long time. Find someone who will help you learn. In my opinion, you should receive instruction from a mentor on breeding decisions for several years before you start making your own choices.

- I believe a person should have a minimum of 10 years of breeding experience to know if they are successful. They should have multiple champions from different crosses.
- BE your dog's best friend. DON'T tell your dogs faults to any one! Be a positive advocate for your dog and tell its qualities. Remember, *quality* is what makes one dog better than the next.

At a show, I had a dog in the exercise pen, and a fellow exhibitor came up and asked me to tell her my dog's faults. I said, "You're looking at the dog, what do you see?" She said she wanted me to tell her what his faults were. I told her sorry, I don't do that. I choose to represent the positive qualities of my dogs."

- LOOK FOR VIRTUES. I see more virtues and faults than the average person sees. Most people don't see how the dog ties in smoothly, how it transitions from front to rear, how the rear ties into the croup and topline, where the hock is set, how its movement is. Seeing and understanding those structural details is so important to becoming a successful breeder.



BISS AKC Silver GCH Briarbrooks
Headliner II. Born 2011. BOB GWASC
Specialty. By BIS BISS AKC Bronze
GCH Briarbrooks Copyright ROM-III
x AKC CH Fianns Music To My Spirit.
Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson.

The breed has always had the battle of correct shoulders. I was told that it takes seven generations to improve and change a front, and three generations to improve a rear—so fronts are more important than rears. I don't even know if you can fix a bad front in seven generations. And in the rears, you can fix them in one generation. You won't fix every puppy, but you can make a lot of progress.

A breeder does not know who will become their foundation sires and dams—the dogs have to prove it in the whelping box. A breeder who

determines who their foundation sire or dam is prior to any litters being born will always come up short. The dogs drive this outcome, and how they produce carries the breed forward. Many outstanding show dogs fail in production. I think this is important for future success of others.

Can you tell me about the road to AKC recognition for Aussies?

When I started in the breed, Aussies were not recognized by the AKC, and it would take about 25 years before the breed received that recognition. In the 1960s and 1970s there were four small registries for Aussies. The National Stock Dog Registry (NSDR) was the registry used in the Midwest. (I lived in the Midwest and my first dogs were initially registered with the NSDR.) A second registry was the Animal Research Foundation in Texas. The Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA) was a West coast breed registry and a fourth registry was the International Australian Shepherd Association (IASA), also established on the West coast. People often registered their Aussies with more than one organization.



AKC GCH Briarbrooks Roll the Dice.
Born 2011. By AKC Silver GCH
Briarbrooks Headliner II x Briarbrooks
Speculation. Photo courtesy of Linda
Wilson.



AKC Bronze GCH Briarbrooks Easy On
The Eyes. Born 2015. By AKC Silver
GCH Briarbrooks Headliner II x AKC
GCH Briarbrooks Zenyatta. Photo
courtesy of Linda Wilson.

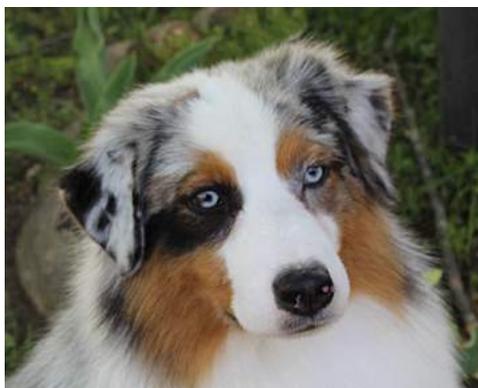
From the time I first started breeding Aussies I believed it was very important for them to be registered with the AKC. Because ASCA's 1973 mission statement was to seek AKC recognition for the breed, I wanted my dogs to be registered with ASCA to prepare for eventual AKC recognition.

About 1976 ASCA was trying to grow their registry so they set up a program to identify and register Aussies. A person could have their dogs inspected by an ASCA breeder-representative and dogs that passed the inspection could then be registered. I went through this process and registered my dogs with ASCA, which was my next step toward becoming part of AKC.

During 1978 ASCA asked its membership to vote about seeking AKC recognition. The vote passed. However, the ASCA board did not proceed to honor that vote.

For about 10 years, from 1980 to 1990, there was a lot of controversy within ASCA about whether or not to seek AKC recognition and the question was brought up for a vote again within the membership. This vote failed.

A small group of us long-time breeders were frustrated and determined to seek AKC recognition. We got together at the 1990 ASCA National Specialty and developed a plan. We started our own Aussie club, the United States Australian Shepherd Association, and approached AKC about recognition of Australian Shepherds. At that time AKC was starting a New Breed



AKC CH Briarbrooks Titanium. Born 2017. Shown a total of 8 times in 2020 and finished his AKC CH with 3 majors. By BIS BISS AKC Silver GCH Briarbrooks Headliner II x AKC GCH Briarbrooks Zenyatta. Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson.

BIS BISS AKC Bronze GCH
Briarbrooks Copyright ROM-III. Born
2002. Sire of 75 Champions. By AKC
CH Briarbrooks Silver Medallion
ROMX-III x AKC CH Briarbrooks
Photo Credit. Photo courtesy of Linda
Wilson.



pilot recognition policy, and after a lot of hard work Australian Shepherds became the first breed to be recognized through the program. On April 15, 1991 Aussies were formally recognized by the American Kennel Club. That day is one of my proudest moments because I and a few other breeders made it happen. It's hard to believe that was almost 30 years ago! Many newer people think Aussies have always been AKC registered.

After you retire from breeding (if ever), how do you want to be remembered?

Tom Peters said, "Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders." I would like to be regarded as a breeder of outstanding Australian Shepherds who moved the breed forward, a breeder that many other kennels used as their foundation.

Cover photo: Linda Wilson with AKC CH Briarbrooks
Silver Medallion ROMX-III. Born 1996. Sire of 33
champions including the 2009 Westminster Best of
Breed winner shown above. By BISS AKC ASCA
CH My Main Man of Heatherhill ROM-III HOF x AKC
ASCA CH Briarbrooks Silver Sequence ROM-III.
Photo courtesy of Linda Wilson. Photo credit: Kohler.

