

RUSTIC ITALIAN VOLPINO



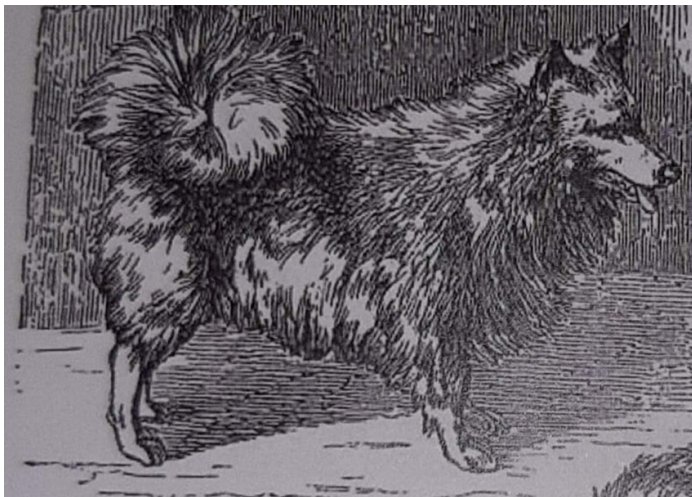
Chous , Puglia (Italy) 360 B.C.-350 B.C. Currently held at The British Museum.

The name 'Italian Volpino' is a relatively recent designation for a breed with a lineage tracing back at least 2,500 years, and potentially even further. This ancient dog was cherished by both the Greeks and Romans, evidenced by numerous artistic depictions and literary references. These sources describe a small to medium-sized, fox-like dog with erect ears, a curled tail, and medium-length fur—unquestionably the direct ancestor of many modern medium and small Spitz breeds, including the Italian Volpino. The Romans referred to them as 'Melitaeus Catulus,' while the Greeks called them 'Melitaion Kunidion.' Primarily kept as companions, these dogs also served as effective alarm/watch dogs and capable mousers.

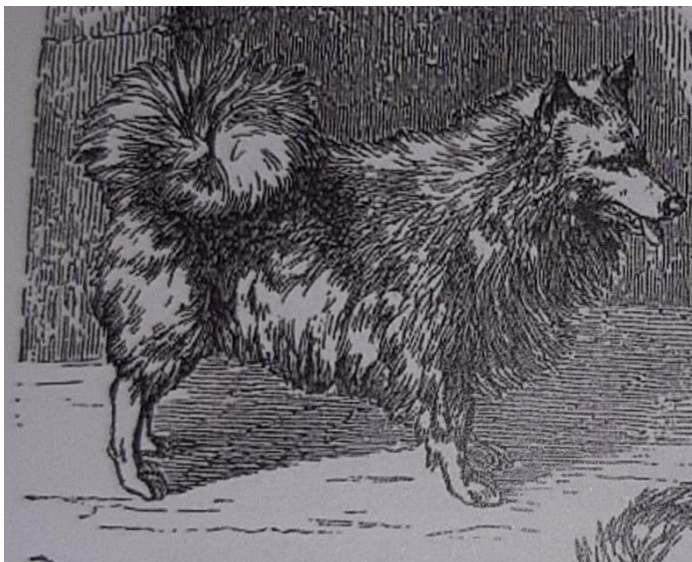


On the left: Roman terracotta statue 100 - 300 A.C. On the right Roman Ivory statue 200 A.C.

A key difference between modern, standardized Show Italian Volpinos and their rustic counterparts lies in their size and conformation. While the official breed standard limits show Volpinos to a maximum height of 30 cm at the withers, Rustic Italian Volpinos exhibit considerable variation in size, head shape, and body type. This diversity stems from their historical breeding, which prioritized functional and working abilities over aesthetic uniformity. Interestingly, one of the earliest breed descriptions, found in an 1887 publication (*Il Cane Razze mondiali, allevamento, ammaestramento, malattie e rimedi*. Milano Hoepli 1887), describes Volpinos with a desirable height of 35-40 cm at the shoulder and a weight range of 8-15 kg, reflecting the larger, more robust build of the working type.



*On the top left: illustration of a Volpino from the book *Il Cane Razze mondiali, allevamento, ammaestramento, malattie e rimedi*. Milano Hoepli 1887. On the top right: image representing the modern Volpino Italiano standard ENCI-FCI*



*On the left illustration of a Volpino from the book *Il Cane Razze mondiali, allevamento, ammaestramento, malattie e rimedi*. Milano Hoepli 1887. On the right photo of Shada Rustic Italian Volpino (Owner: Rustic Italian Volpino UK)*

Historically, and in some cases continuing today, Rustic Italian Volpinos have served as versatile working dogs across various roles:

- **Guard and Livestock Protection:** They functioned as effective alarm and watchdogs, often working in packs alongside larger breeds like Cane Corsos, Neapolitan Mastiffs, and Abruzzese Sheepdogs. Their duties included safeguarding homes, farms, and livestock from predators.
- **Poultry and Small Animal Protection:** They protected poultry houses, chickens, rabbits, and other small farm animals from predators such as foxes, martens, and feral dogs.
- **Carter's Dogs:** Volpinos were favoured by carters, particularly wine carters, due to their accessibility, affordability, compact size for transport, and exceptional anti-theft alarm capabilities.
- **Pest Control:** As skilled mousers and ratters, they were and remain valuable for controlling pest populations on farms and in rural homes.
- **Truffle Hunting:** Many individuals have successfully trained their Volpinos to locate truffles.



On the top left: photo taken in the 1950s in the Abruzzo region of Italy, shows a shepherd with his six Abruzzese Sheepdogs (Cane da Pastore Abruzzese) and a rustic Italian Volpino. On the top right: drawing Wine cart Charles Coleman 1850



On the left: painting "Nella stalla" Filippo Palizzi 1818-1899. On the right: photo of a 1890 circa Roman wine carter with his Rustic Italian Volpino.

Their temperament can be various but generally they have a good predisposition of living in pack, structuring the pack hierarchically. They are always ready to give the alarm in case of potential danger. Like other ancient dog breeds, the Rustic Italian Volpino has not been selectively bred for strict obedience. This results in a more independent temperament and a tendency to be less eager to please their owners. To foster a successful domestic partnership, owners must establish themselves as strong leaders, rather than adopting overly permissive roles. As they are highly food-motivated, utilizing tasty treats is essential for effective training. Conversely, the Volpino makes an excellent family dog, also suitable for first-time owners. With proper socialization, they are known to get along well with children, other dogs, and various animals, including cats, rabbits, chickens, and horses.



Rustic Italian Volpinos ETNA, SEVEN and SHADA (Owner Rustic Italian Volpino UK)

The rigorous tough selection experienced by Rustic Italian Volpinos has resulted in exceptional sturdiness and health. Their longevity is legendary in rural areas. My own DNA testing of over a dozen rustic Volpinos has consistently shown 100% clearance from over 200 genetic diseases. In stark contrast, the standardized Show Italian Volpino, due to genetic limitations imposed by the official kennel club's breeding practices, has become known for its prevalence of fixed genetic disorders. Furthermore, I have received reports from dog agility competitors that the smaller size of show Volpinos makes them prone to injuries, and that the breed is becoming so fragile that its suitability as a companion animal is being questioned.



Rustic Italian Volpinos, Etna and Seven (Owner: Rustic Italian Volpino UK)

One of the most common questions I receive concerns the distinction between rustic Italian Volpinos and show-pedigreed Volpinos, the answer is quite easy. In Italy we had for thousands of years a large population of Volpinos with different shapes and sizes, one day in recent times someone decided to create an official breed and so to write a specific standard. The official breed standard represents only a small fraction of the Volpinos found in Italy. The remaining population, often simply called 'Volpini' or 'Pumetti' by locals, can be classified as Rustic Italian Volpinos. While official breeders adhere to the established standard, rustic Italian Volpino breeders follow diverse personal criteria, typically prioritizing specific working abilities or aesthetic preferences. Notably, many rustic Italian Volpinos live freely as feral or semi-feral dogs, often interbreeding with other breeds. Consequently, rustic Italian Volpinos, including crossbred examples, are frequently found in Italian animal shelters.



Rustic Italian Volpinos Seven, Vespa, Tita and Shada. (Owner: Rustic Italian Volpino UK)

Currently, I'm aware of only a small number of dedicated Rustic Italian Volpino breeders. However, many farmers and working individuals in the Italian countryside own and occasionally breed these dogs, though they are rarely found on social media. I believe I am presently the only Rustic Italian Volpino breeder operating outside of Italy, specifically in the UK.

I was born and raised in Abruzzo, Italy, where the Rustic Italian Volpino is a common sight in the countryside. Like many Italians, I initially paid them little attention, finding them rather ordinary and unremarkable. However, after spending several years abroad in the UK, where I encountered numerous modern and trendy breeds, I returned to Italy and saw the Rustic Italian Volpino with fresh eyes. I was truly astonished. Their simple yet wild appearance completely captivated me. I couldn't believe I had previously overlooked their beauty. It's often true that we only appreciate something after we've been without it. Since that moment, I embarked on my journey as a Rustic Italian Volpino breeder in UK, dedicated to sharing this amazing breed and its incredible, millennia-old history with the world. My kennel's name is Rustic Italian Volpino UK.



Rustic Italian Volpinos Vespa, Tita and Seven. (Owner: Rustic Italian Volpino UK)

I am dedicated to preserving a distinct phenotype that intentionally diverges from the official breed standard. My focus is on accentuating their fox-like features, particularly in the head and expression, while simultaneously safeguarding their renowned health and resilience.



Comparing wild fox heads and expressions with Rustic Italian Volpinos (Volpino's owner: Rustic Italian Volpino UK)

To ensure the success of my breeding program, I employ a blend of modern scientific tools, such as comprehensive DNA testing, alongside time-honoured practices, namely natural raw feeding and a predominantly outdoor lifestyle. It is my firm belief that breeding these dogs indoors, coupled with an industrial diet, will progressively erode their inherent rusticity, ultimately rendering them indistinguishable from the multitude of compromised modern breeds.

Gabriele Monticelli

www.rusticitalianvolpinouk.com