

# AKC Gazette Column - by Grace Massey

## About the AKC Breed Columns:

*The Breed columns are a time-honored feature of the AKC Gazette. Each columnist is appointed by a breed's national parent club, which preserves the breed's standard and helps to educate breeders, judges, and the public about the breed's history, function, and possible health issues. A national parent club is comprised of dedicated breeders and fanciers, and it represents many years of collective experience in the breed. Columnists are asked to write about topics of interest to the fancy in general as well as those of specific interest to judges and devotees of the breed.*

## Australian Terrier Breed Column

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### **Socialization for Breed Awareness**

I believe, and many will agree, socialization starts at birth. I handle my puppies as soon as they are born to document sex and birth weight. As per Puppy Culture and other experts, my puppies are introduced to noises, new challenges, and as many visitors as I can get to stop by the house during their first 12 weeks. However, I think my favorite part of socialization starts when they are around 8 weeks old, after their first shot, when I get them out into the world to meet people away from my home. The car rides take a little getting used to for some of the puppies, but oh how they respond to the sights and sounds of new places!

While pet supply stores are the first place many people take their puppies and dogs, I like to go to home improvement stores. There are fewer dogs, so my puppies tend to get more attention from random people. I put the puppies on a towel in a shopping cart and push them around the store. This keeps them off the floor and allows them to see more. It also allows them to greet people of all types, wearing all types of clothing, without being hovered over, which can be intimidating. The puppies quickly get to the point where they are welcoming to each and every person they see. They, however, are not the only ones that benefit from the interaction. Many people, while they recognize a terrier, have never met an Australian Terrier. This is where socialization meets breed awareness.

Most people are first attracted to the "cute fuzzy face" in the basket and are surprised that the puppies are not jumping around in the basket trying to gain attention (due to the demanding skill learned through Puppy Culture). The puppies typically sit or stand with their feet on the top of the basket and look at each person we pass. If the person makes eye contact with a puppy, that puppy will start wagging their tail in invitation. The person is then hooked and will stop to give the puppies attention. Almost all will ask, "What kind of dog (terrier) are they?" Some people will guess other terrier breeds but are sure they are wrong even as they guess. We then talk about the Australian Terrier, and I share pictures of some of my adults. We talk about what the Aussie was bred for and what its distinguishing characteristics are.

Many people are very surprised by how well behaved and responsive the puppies are. They love that they are already sitting on command (I give the person treats to give to the puppies but ask them to make the puppies sit before giving it to the them). Many people comment on how SMART and BEAUTIFUL the puppies are. As the breeder I am biased, but I tell them that they are typical Aussies. These people then walk away after a very positive experience with Australian Terriers. This is great, as the more people who meet and recognize an Australian Terrier, the more sustainable our breed becomes.

