

# A Blast From The Past

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## History

The Australian Terrier has been recognized by the American Kennel Club since 1960, and it ranks in popularity about halfway down the list of AKC breeds. It is not, however, one of the better known breeds of Terriers, and an Aussie owner walking his dog may expect to hear such remarks as "What kind of dog is that?" or "Is that a Cairn?" "...a Norwich?" ...A big Yorkie?"

These remarks are not far from the truth, for the Aussie shares a common ancestry with all of those breeds, and with most of the other short-legged terriers of Great Britain. The Aussie harks back to that progenitor of the short-legged terriers, the old Scotch Terrier, a rough-coated black and tan dog not to be confused with today's Scottie.

As the name indicates, the Australian Terrier was developed in the land down under sometime during the 19th century, perhaps as early as 1830, the only terrier breed other than the Schnauzer not originating in the British Isles. Small, rough-coated terriers were used to keep rats and other vermin under control on ships, and the Aussie's ancestors may have been smuggled ashore from ships taking settlers to Australia. Tasmanian settlers also found these dogs invaluable, as they warned of marauding aborigines and escaped prisoners, two real dangers in the early settlements.

The terriers were extremely useful as vermin and snake exterminators and were prized for their watchdog abilities - traits still apparent in the present-day Aussie. These rough-coated little terriers were later crossed with other terrier breeds from Great Britain: the Dandie Dinmont, the Cairn, the Yorkshire, possibly the Manchester and the Irish, although no one knows with absolute certainty.

Whatever its ancestry, the Aussie has emerged as a spunky little terrier: game, high-spirited and courageous, yet possessing an enormous amount of sensitivity. Because he was developed in close association with man under often stressful conditions, he has a strong sense of devotion to his household.

The Australian Terrier is a genuine charmer and, once hooked, few Aussie owners ever switch breeds. What's more, many find they can't own just one. However, not all Aussies are generous enough to be willing to share their owners, and two males generally will not be able to live together peacefully.

Most are good with children as well as senior citizens, so they make excellent family pets. As with any small dog, supervision with toddlers is essential, for the dog's protection as well as the child's. Aussies are equally suited for town or country living as long as provision is made for safe exercise. An Aussie should NEVER run loose! The instinct to hunt is so strong that he will not stop to check traffic if he sees a squirrel or strange cat.

## Description

The Standard describes the physical properties of the ideal Australian Terrier. Because of copyright concerns over the collection of all Standards at any single site storing all the faqs, AKC Standards are not typically included in the breed FAQs. The Australian Terrier Club of America can provide the reader with a copy of the Standard. ATCA also has a nice book available - complete with illustrations, that is helpful in understanding the breed standard.

The Australian Terrier is a sturdy, low-set breed, somewhat longer in relation to height, alert and strong in terrier personality, and a very active little dog. A mature Australian Terrier should measure 10 to 11 inches at the shoulder and weigh approximately 14 to 16 lbs. However many of today's Aussies are considerably larger. His coat is harsh to the touch, with a softer undercoat, and it comes in two colors: blue/tan or sandy/red. The body coat is 2 to 2 1/2" inches in length with longer hair on the chest, called the apron. There is a ruff around the neck (said to offer protection against snakes and rodents) and a longer, softer (and lighter in color) topknot. The topknot is the gift of the Dandie Dinmont ancestry. The eyes are small, dark and almond shaped: They reflect a world of love, loyalty and devotion to their people.

## Care

The Aussie is an "easy keeper." Compared with many of the sculptured, barbered breeds of the terrier group, a pet Aussie is relatively easy to groom: Use your fingers to pluck the long hairs growing in front of and between the eyes. If left, these can irritate the eyes. Also pluck any long hairs protruding beyond the edges of the ears. Trim around the feet and tail with scissors. An occasional bath and regular brushing will keep insect pests down and shedding to a minimum. Many of the herbal extracts and perfumes used in shampoos can irritate sensitive skin. Some Aussies do better with a mild, hypoallergenic shampoo. Nail trimming is needed regularly and should be started early and with gentle restraint. The pet Aussie can be maintained adequately with regular combing and brushing and an occasional bath and nail clipping. Flea control is vital, since some Aussies are prone to flea-bite dermatitis. Show dogs require considerably more hand plucking and shaping to give them the elegant profile needed in the show ring. A detailed grooming chart is available from the ATCA.

Most Australian Terriers have hearty appetites; they are not fussy eaters. They are adaptable dogs and travel well. A healthy breed with few genetic problems, Aussies are noted for longevity, with many living into their teens.

## Training

The Australian Terrier is an intelligent, inquisitive little dog with an innovative outlook on life that carries over into its learning experiences. The Aussie is a quick learner, and quite a crowd pleaser, but easily bored by repetition, and does not respond positively to harsh training methods or severe corrections.

Since all the Terriers tend to be very dominant and somewhat dog-aggressive, proper socialization of the puppy is a must. A puppy training class is recommended and these are often offered by a local dog club or recreation department. An introductory obedience class serves to socialize the puppy by getting it out around other people and dogs, teaches it car manners, and how to behave on a leash. It also gives you - the owner, a support group for help with problems such as chewing and housebreaking.

Motivation is an important key in training the Australian Terrier. The task at hand must be made challenging and fun, and the trainer should find some kind of incentive, in the form of treats, toys, or verbal praise that the dog best responds to. Australian Terriers do not work for nothing!

Crate training is recommended, starting with puppyhood. This aids in housebreaking and provides a "den" or refuge for the dog later in life, as well as a means of safe travel in the car. Australian Terriers are considered "house dogs" and should not be kenneled or confined outside of the household.

Australian Terriers are easily bored with routine, so short training sessions with lots of rewards are most successful. An Aussie may do an exercise enthusiastically but not always correctly about twice, then announce it is time to go play with the tennis ball! To keep the dog focused on you, the trainer, YOU must become the most interesting object in the training session.

Terriers in general can be willful and stubborn, and terrier adolescence can be a very trying experience for the novice owner. A firm, consistent approach to what is and what is not acceptable behavior will prevent the Aussie from becoming a household tyrant. A well-trained and well-socialized dog is a pleasure to be around.

Australian Terriers have been trained successfully in all levels of obedience, agility, earthdog, and tracking, and have competed in national obedience events. They should not, however, be compared to other breeds of dogs such as Golden Retrievers or Border Collies, or even the family pet you owned as a child. Expect the unexpected as you train or exhibit, and maintain your sense of humor. (Your dog will certainly always have his!)

## Health and Medical Problems

Australian Terriers are fortunate in that they do not yet have many of the genetic health problems that affect other breeds. This breed does seem to have a predisposition for diabetes and thyroid disorders. These conditions can easily be managed by a committed owner and veterinarian. On rare occasions, epilepsy has been reported. Like other members of the terrier group, Australian Terriers seem prone to itchy skin and allergies, particularly in warmer climates. These skin conditions may occasionally be caused by an easily corrected imbalance in the thyroid function but are often environmental. Flea and parasite control are essential. A change to a premium lamb and rice food often helps, as does supplementation with fatty acids. Sometimes itchy skin conditions can be caused by perfumes and harsh chemicals used in shampoos and flea sprays.

As with other small, active breeds, the Aussie can be affected by a condition called luxating patellas, where the knee cap of the rear legs slips in and out of its groove. This can cause pain and lameness and may require surgical intervention. Although the Aussie does not have hip dysplasia, it can be affected by a similar condition called Legg-Calve Perthes disease (aseptic necrosis). This disease causes the bone of the femoral head to die and to be gradually resorbed, resulting in collapse of the bone and deformation of the hip joint. The condition leads to degenerative changes in the hip and development of arthritis. Age of onset is typically 5-9 months. The cause is not known. It is diagnosed via x-ray and can be surgically corrected. The prognosis is generally good.

Both luxating patellas and Legg-Calve-Perthes disease are thought to be inherited conditions. Both conditions are aggravated by excessive weight. Some breeders of Australian Terriers are currently having their breeding stock x-rayed and rated by Orthopedic Foundation of America (OFA) and their eyes tested by a veterinary ophthalmologist (CERF).

In general, the Aussie is a very sturdy, healthy breed, prone to a long life with few and relatively minor health problems.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *What is it like to live with an Australian Terrier?*

Sometimes exasperating, frequently lively, never dull and nearly always fun. Although the Aussie will sympathize with your sad moods, its temperament is basically upbeat. Many sport a puckish sense of humor, and they tend to be clowns. They are clever and crafty. As with any breed, this one is not for everyone. Although Aussies are not snappy or aggressive, neither are they docile glad-handers. And while not yappy, they are watchdogs at heart, quick to sound the alarm if something or someone strange enters their territory. Their voices are loud and sharp. Born to be hunters, they will chase squirrels, rabbits, and lizards. And yes, they will chase cats - with enthusiasm! But many Aussie owners are also cat owners, so the dogs can be discriminating.

If landscape gardening is your hobby, you will be wise to choose another breed. These dogs are diggers, and just a hint of mole or shrew will set those front paws into motion and earth flying. In addition, they are - like other terriers - impulsive. Don't even consider owning one if your yard is unfenced, because these eager little hunters won't stop to watch for cars. But if you would like a handy, small-sized dog with a lion's heart, a dog that is lovable, loyal, hardy and entertaining, then an Australian Terrier may be in your future.

### *Where can I find an Australian Terrier?*

The Australian Terrier Club of America maintains a Breeder Referral service, Referral by the breed club does not mean the club endorses the breeder. You must still personally screen the breeder. Please read Cindy Moore's FAQ "Getting A Dog" for tips, and the ATCA's online guide, "How To Select A Breeder." Before you put down any deposit, make sure the breeder gives you a written sales agreement to review. It should contain the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the buyer and seller, as well as the names and registration numbers of the sire and dam, a brief description of the puppy and some form of health guarantee. The health guarantee should allow you a minimum of 48 hours to have the puppy checked by your veterinarian and to return it, should he find a health problem. If an advance deposit is required, be sure to get the terms, such as refund policy or other conditions, in writing.

Australian Terrier Rescue, can often provide those who do not wish to cope with a puppy with a nice adult dog. 🐾