

# A Blast From The Past

By Joyce Edworthy  
written around 1980  
How Blue is Blue?

In all the years that I have been involved with the Australian Terriers, the most vexing question has always been a true description of the Blue and Tan coat. It does seem to me that when color faults appear in the Sandy/Red exhibits they are not penalized so heavily as those in the Blue and Tan exhibit. In fact color problems seem only to be thought of as pertaining to the Blue and Tan. Let us talk about Standards. How are these decided? In many instances our Terrier Standards were devised years ago in England by a panel of 'Experts' of that time and in many cases still hold good today. Some remarkable descriptions have come from these panels. Do you know that a Manchester Terrier should have oblong eyes and the Bedlington eye should appear to be triangular? Ask a Bedlington expert to tell you what is meant by 'Filbert' shaped ears. I have heard several suggested reasons for this description - none of them coming anywhere near to describing the actual shape of the Bedlington Terrier's ears. The West Highland Terrier has a 'Varminty' appearance according to the Standard. One dictionary gives the meaning of 'Varminty' as being 'Vermin' whereas most English people will know that this description was used many years ago for dirty and unwashed young boys of artful character. Neither description fits the beautiful West Highland White Terriers.

Should these descriptions will be used in current Standards? My training as a judge was based on looking for the good points as laid down in the Standard. No exhibit is perfect. In my opinion, even top exhibits have at least two features, which fall short of perfection. A judge has to forgive many shortcomings in their close examination of exhibits. Where descriptions in Standard fall short there will be a variety of interpretations.

Color is one part of many things, which a judge will look for in judging the coat. A good judge will examine the coat deciding the color merits, be it Sandy/Red or a Blue and Tan exhibit and then proceed to examine the exhibit further for other coat requirements and doing so in a way showing no color preference. Blue and Tan coats will be found with incorrect sandy hairs through the body coat and Sandy/Red exhibits will have Black and even White hairs. Often coats devoid of undercoat. This later is a most important requirement as our dogs should be hardy enough to live out of doors and as former working dogs, this undercoat is a must. From outside the judging ring, lack of undercoat and faulty coat is not noticeable. Texture of coat is examined. Length of body coat should be 2 1/2" or 6.35 cms. How about measuring the body coat of your exhibits? No cheating - I do not mean the Ruff or Apron. Does your Australian Terrier fail in this regard? Take heart, it is only one of the many requirements. I have listed at least five features a judge should look for and so far this is the only one on body coat.

Now let us get to the controversial bit about color. 'Blue'/'Steel Blue' or 'Dark Grey Blue'. When the Blue and Tan part of our Standard was devised did the gentlemen present (and they would have been males making the decisions for us) really have an appreciation of color? Had they been asked to purchase a dress for their wives on the above lines, would they have not brought home materials of solid color? *i.e.* Blue, Steel Blue or Dark Grey Blue. Can you picture the faces of the wives if in each case these colors were interspersed or tipped with black! To emphasize my point, if we are to take the Standard literally, then the ONLY colors are those described. 'Blue', 'Steel Blue' and 'Dark Grey Blue'



with no suggestion of Black anywhere. This would therefore exclude every Blue and Tan exhibit, which has been shown in the past as well as those currently being shown. On this basis we never have had a Blue and Tan exhibit which conformed to the Standard for color *i.e.* solid color.

The streaks of grey in human hair but in the same case of our Australian Terrier, the tips of the hair are black. It is only my opinion that a clean, glossy coated Blue and Tan exhibit, shown in sunlight, will glisten and appear to be solid black. Make no mistake; I much prefer our clean, well-groomed exhibits of today to those shown many years ago. I have always suggested to trainee judges that these shiny dogs should be examined in the shade. I have further said that once evidence has been seen of a break in the coat, *i.e.* the blue showing through no matter how little, as a Standard is not clear on the point of color, then this break can be considered as sufficient. With so many other features of the coat and the dog in general, I suggest that some forgiveness may be given if the Blue is not prolific.

Let us for one moment suppose that we have found a Blue and Tan exhibit which does conform to the Standard (revised of course!) and in every instance as listed above the coat reaches perfection, how will a judge place this exhibit if it has a weak head, poor front and no animation? Coat and color are very important. So too are all the other points of our Australian Terrier but above all, he must be of excellent type then the judge can go through their process of 'forgiveness' where points do not come into expectations. The judge who makes the decisions solely on the color of the Australian Terrier is as bad as those who will not tolerate a bad mouth or who are cranks on movement.

By all means, breeders should try to improve on color and refrain from cross-mating Reds to Blues. It would also be a good idea to have Standards altered giving a better description for the color Blue. Until something is done this argument which has been with us since the early 1950s will never be solved.