

# A Blast From The Past

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Color in the Australian Terrier:

The color of the coat in the Australian Terrier is one of the most interesting and difficult points to establish in the breeding of the Aussie, and it is also one of the most misunderstood and controversial subjects between breeders, owners of one or two dogs, and judges who are expected to know the requirements of the Standard regarding the color and texture of the coat. Unfortunately, in the latter case, there are too many who attach small importance to the color whether it is correct or not, or have a bias toward a certain color which influences them consciously or unconsciously.

Color is definitely associated with texture, and in the assessing of points the same number is allowed for each and, as both the color and the coat contribute so much to the general appearance of the dogs, and points allowed for general appearance equal then total allowed for color and coat, almost half of the full total of 100 points is involved in judging to the Standard.

To understand color, one must study the evolution of the breed. As far as I have been able to ascertain, speculation, not knowledge, has formulated the theory of its origin, but it has been quite authoritatively stated that certain breeds which were British in origin, were known to have been used to create the breed. These British dogs, namely, the Skye, Scotch and Dandie Dinmont Terriers, had a common ancestry. When the Australian Terrier was first exhibited in Australia in 1885 it has been stated that it was then similar in type to the Scotch Terrier and was known as the Rough Coated Terrier. I want to impress upon those who are unfamiliar with the old Scotch Terrier, not to confuse it with the present Scottie dog we know so well.

There is no doubt that we owe a tremendous debt to the breeders of the past, as the type was very mixed - all sizes, shapes, colors - and it was one of the hardest tasks to breed to uniformity. The Aussie was originally created to be a useful, game, small dog. With hordes of rats plaguing the southern cities, it was referred to as the Rat Terrier.

In the evolution to uniformity, the Yorkshire, the Irish and the Black and Tan Terriers were known to have been used, as well as the Skye, the Scotch and the Dandie Dinmont. It is claimed by some that the Cairn Terrier was also used, but it has been stated very authoritatively that the type was more or less fixed before the Cairn Terrier was introduced to Australia after World War I.

I have been told by a southern breeder that the Norwich Terrier has also been used, and with so many persons trying to improve the dog I daresay various breeds have been used which perhaps we may never know about. Be this as it may, it is not disputed that a number of breeds were used to create the Aussie of today and in considering these different breeds in their sizes and colors, it is not difficult to understand the variety which appears in the breed and to realize that it is still difficult and most interesting breed to work with.

Whatever the origin and the diversity of opinions, there has been no dispute concerning the color grouping of the coat. This was divided into two classes, No 1 embracing the bi-color blue and tan, and No 2

covering sandy or red. These two group colors were definitely recognized in 1895. The sandy or reds were sometimes called the straw color. In 1889 a Club to foster the breed was formed in Melbourne. In the Standard, ears were permitted to be pricked or dropped towards the front, and they were also cut, but this practice was abolished in Australia in 1896. The standard which we possess today was adopted by the Kennel Control Council of Victoria on October 23, 1947. In this Standard, the grouping of color is still the same. Actually in Group 2 there are two colors listed. Sandy AND red, whereas in Group 1 it is one color; Blue and tan with its variety of shades in body color and topknot. Body color is listed as Blue, Blue-Black, and Grey-Black shades with tan - the richer the tan the better - on face and legs.

The coat of the blue dogs should be bluish at the roots of the hair and darker at the ends, to give a nice dark bluish color. It is definitely stated that black, or coal-black, coat color is not desirable, although forgiven in a puppy whose coat may not color up until much later. But nowhere is it stated that pale fawn to a wheaten shade in place of the rich tan is correct, and unfortunately so many adult dogs with black coats and wheaten colors, instead of tan are accepted as correct, that it has been suggested quite seriously that the Standard should be altered to accept these as correct! Admittedly, it is the most difficult thing to do to breed a good specimen with the correct coat coloring, but it is the ideal which has been set and should be worked for.

There is diversity of opinion as to who the broken coats are caused, or can be corrected, and this is where a study of ancestors on the pedigree will be of benefit. Good coat color doesn't just happen, and it is invariably allied with the correct coat texture. The Standard calls for a harsh and weather-resistant coat of 2-2 1/2 inches in length, a rough, hard coat with a short undercoat to make the coat weather-resistant, as the Aussie is working Terrier going to earth after vermin, rabbits and other game, and requires a coat to withstand the roughness of the earth and its herbage, which a soft-coat is unable to do.

Time does not permit me to deal exhaustively with the whole question of color, with its desirable and undesirable features, and I hope that I have not discouraged any novice breeders by drawing attention to the necessity and difficulty in achieving the correct color. In my limited breeding experience I assure you I have found it one of the most fascinating points to experiment with, to produce good color with correct texture of coat in the two groups, as well as all the other important features necessary to produce a dog true to type and character. The general type in Aussies may be mixed, but I think everyone will agree that the character of the breed runs very hard - intelligent, affectionate, and game and whether we prefer a Blue and Tan, or a Sandy or Red, or all of them (as I do) we will find no fault with the Aussie as a grand little dog.