

Judging the Australian Terrier

By Jane Tenor & Ida Ellen Weinstock

Form ever follows function.¹ This principle is important today in evaluating an Australian Terrier because to understand the form one must understand the functions for which the breed was used.

Functions

As they expanded the frontiers of their country, the early settlers of Australia developed a small, sturdy terrier with a weather resistant coat, which was able to work a full day outside in rough terrain. They were used to help control rodents and snakes on the home front, waterfronts, farms, sheep and cattle stations in the outback.



These terriers had to be courageous, agile enough to leap out of harms way and determined enough to finish the task when hunting snakes and rodents or while fending off intruders. Aussies were also used to tend livestock. These tireless little workers had to cover great distances efficiently to work with the livestock. Their harsh double coat protected them in Australia's varied climate. When guarding the mines, or when intruders appeared the ability to recognize danger and sound the alarm was prized. As companions in the home to relive the loneliness of the vast empty outback, their loyalty, intelligence and willingness to please were invaluable.

When judging Australian Terriers their form must reflect these uses and functions. They are not exotic, extreme or exaggerated. Their naturalness is an important breed characteristic.

The Form

When observed in the ring, you should see an alert, spirited and self-assured terrier. It is small, sturdy, medium boned and blue & tan, red or sandy in color. "Faults: Shyness or aggressiveness toward people"²

The height is 10-11 inches at the withers. While the Australian Terrier is listed among the short-legged terriers, in actual fact the length of leg from the elbow to the ground is at least 50% of its height measured from the withers to the ground. The term low set is used to describe the Aussie chest, which should drop below the elbow approximately 1 inch. This is not a reference to short legs but to the chest in relation to the ground; it doesn't translate into shortness of leg.



The body is long in comparison to the back: the additional length is formed by correct angles of the front with prominent forechest and the rear, which extends behind the tail forming a well rounded butt. The length of back measured from the withers to the front of the tail is approximately 1-1½ inches longer than from withers to the ground. Substance is determined by good working condition, correct body proportions, medium bone, symmetry and balance.

Head

The head is long, strong and covered with a lighter colored soft, silky topknot. A distinctive characteristic of the Aussie it covers the skull and is silver or a lighter shade than the rest of the head. Muzzle is of equal length to the skull with a slight stop. The flat clean-sided skull is slightly longer than it is wide. Jaws are powerful, teeth are large, and bite is scissors. Incorrect: a too wide skull, a domed skull, a weak, snipey muzzle, a muzzle lacking a chin and a too short muzzle. Lips are tight with a narrow black or brown rim. The expression is keen and intelligent.



The small pointed ears are set on high and well apart. The ears should not flair off to the side or be set too close together. Aussies are sensitive in the use of their ears. A confident, alert Aussie may lay his ears back when you approach, this is a friendly gesture.

The eyes are oval shaped and dark brown to black. They should be set at a slightly oblique angle, well apart, with fill between and below them. Narrow black rims surround the eyes. The following are incorrect: lack of pigmentation, liver colored pigmentation, and excessive (too wide) black rims. "Faults: Light-colored or protruding eyes."²

The nose is black. In mature dogs there is an area free of hair, which runs up the bridge of the nose forming an inverted v. The nose leather is a desirable breed characteristic of the mature Australian Terrier.

Neck, Body and Topline

Neck is long, slightly arched, with a protective ruff blending into the apron. The distinctive ruff and apron serve as protection for the throat and forechest and are distinguishing characteristics of the Australian Terrier. The neck flows smoothly into well laid back shoulders.

The body is described as sturdy and should never be stocky or weedy. The ribs are well sprung, but not round, and extend well behind the elbows. The chest drops about an inch below the elbow with a distinct keel. The loin is strong and fairly short [no more than 4 fingers in width] with slight tuck-up. Backline is level and firm; tail is docked, set on high and carried at a 12 to 1 o'clock position. "Faults: Cobbiness, too long in loin."²

Forequarters

Looking at the forequarters in profile, you should see the distinctive keel and prominent forechest. These are distinguishing structural features of the breed. The forechest and keel protect the heart and lungs, give more support to the muscles of the long slightly arched neck and those holding the front together, providing balance to the forequarters. These features are important to the form and functions of the Aussie and elements of correct breed type.

The shoulder blade and upper arm are of equal length and form a 90° angle. The front legs are set well under the body and the elbows fall beneath the withers and lie close to the chest. The front legs are straight, round and with medium bone. “Faults: Straight, loose and loaded shoulders.”²

Front pasterns are strong with only a slight slope. “Faults: Down on pasterns.”²



Hindquarters

Correct length and angle of bones give width and substance to hindquarters. Legs should be strong and well angulated at stifle and hock, rear pasterns short and perpendicular from the hocks to the ground. Upper and lower thighs are well muscled. Viewed from behind the rear legs are straight from hip joint to the ground and in the same plane as the forelegs. “Faults: Lack of muscular development or excessive muscularity.”*

Gait

Aussies should move freely with a ground-covering stride as befits their heritage as tireless workers. The front leg reaches well in front of the body, the rear leg drives forward and steps into the spot just left by the front foot. There should be no gap between. The motion is forward and not up; the backline stays firm and level without bounce. Viewed from the front or the rear the legs move parallel or towards a single track. They are light on their feet, able to twist and turn effortlessly. This athletic ability is as important today as it was in the past.

Coat and Color

Aussies are double coated with a short, soft undercoat and harsh 2½” outer coat. The furnishings are softer than the body coat. Covering only the top of the skull, the topknot is of finer and softer texture than the rest of the coat. Correct colors are blue & tan, solid sandy and solid red. The color of the blue & tans can range from dark blue, steel blue, dark grey blue, to silver blue. Tan should be rich in color but not red. Any shade of solid red or solid sandy is correct. “Faults: All black body coat in the adult dog. Tan smut in the blue portion of the coat, or dark smut in sandy/red coated dogs. In any color, white markings on chest or feet are to be penalized.”²



Things to Remember and Check For

Check for the prominent forechest and keel as these are distinctive structural features.

Proper length of body must come from the correct angles of both front and rear and there should be something to fill the hand both in front and at the buttocks. The Aussie does not present a square outline. Remember the length of back is 1-1½” longer than height at withers.

Remember the muzzle should be long and strong and equal in length to the flat, clean-sided skull.

The proportion of the shoulder and upper arm is 1:1 and form a 90° angle.

The expression is keen and intelligent.

The new 2014 ATCA Judging The Australian Terrier Power Point can be seen at www.australianterrier.org.

1. Sullivan, Louis H. (1896). "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered". *Lippincott's Magazine* (March 1896): 403–409.
2. Australian Terrier Standard, approved by the American Kennel Club 8/9/88.

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