

Judging Australian Terriers

When you see an Australian Terrier in the ring ready to be judged, you should see an alert, spirited and self-assured terrier that is small, sturdy, either blue & tan, red or sandy, with a long, strong head covered with a soft, silky topknot. Ears are pricked, neck long and slightly arched, backline level, and tail docked. The body should be long in comparison to the back: the additional length is formed by correct angles of front with prominent forechest, and the rear which extends behind the tail forming a well-rounded butt. The front legs are set well under the body.

With the dog on the table, look for a keen, intelligent expression. Notice the soft silky topknot, protective ruff and apron. These are distinctive characteristics of the Aussie. The topknot covers the skull and is silver or a lighter shade than the rest of the head. The ruff frames the head and blends down into the apron.

The eyes are dark brown to black, small, and oval shaped. 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."*

The small and pointed ears are set on high and well apart. This sounds like a contradiction in terms but is not. If the outer edge of the ear is vertical or if the sides form part of an equilateral triangle, the point of the ear should be directly above the outer corner of the eye. 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. If the dog doesn't respond to your attempt to get it to raise its ears, try again when the dog is on the ground. Some respond to sound, others to hand movement. When gaiting, the dog may turn its ears to the side so they don't catch the breeze.

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. This black area, the nose leather, is a desirable breed characteristic of the mature Australian Terrier.

Approaching the head for examination, bring your hand under the muzzle, check for a scissors bite and teeth of good size. Also note the tight lips with a narrow brown or black rim. Place your hand gently on the top of the skull and check to see that it is flat. Then run your hand along the top of the muzzle toward the skull, checking for the slight but definite stop. The sides of the skull, should be clean and free of excessive thickness in the cheekbones.

Now examine the head for the correct one-to-one proportion of length of head and muzzle. The muzzle is long and strong, of equal length to the skull. The skull should be slightly longer than it is wide and full between the eyes. These proportions are essential for correct breed type.

Place your hands one on each side of the head. You should feel a more rectangular shape rather than a pie-shaped wedge. If your hands flare out on the sides of the skull, you need to check the width of the skull which should be slightly less than its length. Incorrect: a too wide skull, a domed skull, a weak, snipey muzzle, a muzzle lacking a chin, or a too short muzzle. Remember, the muzzle should be long and strong and equal in length to the flat, clean-sided skull.

The front legs are straight and with medium bone. Front pasterns should be strong with only slight slope. "Faults: Down on pasterns."* Feet small and catlike toeing neither in nor out. Dewclaws should be removed. Nails are black. The elbows should fit against the sides of the chest.

Moving to the side of the dog, look for a long, slightly arched neck. Feel the neck for its length and check that the arch is dog and not artful grooming. The head and neck should angle forward as well as upward. Continue running your hand down the neck to the back. Check that there is only a slight space between the shoulder blades at the withers and that shoulders are well laid back. The shoulder blade and upper arm should be of equal length and ideally form a 90-degree angle. This allows for maximum forward reach of the front legs. The elbows are located below the withers; the forechest should protrude at the front; the forelegs are set well under the body. The ribs should be well sprung and the chest should drop about 1" below the elbow.

In profile, you should see a distinctive keel and prominent forechest. These are distinguishing features of the breed. The forechest protects the heart and lungs, gives more support to the muscles of the neck and those holding the front together, and provides balance to the forequarters. Place your hand on the front of the chest; the forechest should fill your hand. Without checking, your eye may be deceived by the work of a good groomer disguising its lack with an abundance of coat. It is important that these features, the distinctive keel and prominent forechest, not be lost. They are important elements of correct breed type.

While the Australian Terrier is usually 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 drops below the elbow. It is not a reference to short legs but rather to the chest in relation to the ground. It doesn't translate into shortness of leg. The Standard calls for a height at the withers of 10" to 11". The back is slightly longer than the dog is tall (1" – 1 ½"). The loin is fairly short, no more than four fingers in width with slight tuck-up. "Faults: Cobbiness, too long in loin." *

Run your hand along the back; check for a level backline, correct length of loin and high tail set. The docked tail is carried at a 12 to 1 o'clock position. Place your hand on the back of the tail and lower the hand. The point of the buttocks should stop it. The buttocks should fill the hand. Artful grooming in this area can disguise the lack of rear angulation. The stifles should be well turned; the hocks and rear pasterns behind the rear end of the body. The hocks should be well let down and the rear pasterns perpendicular to the ground.

From the rear, feel the upper and lower thighs which should be firmly muscled. Rear legs should be straight from the hips joints to the ground. "Faults: Lack of muscular development or excessive muscularity." *

Aussies are double coated with a short, soft undercoat and harsh 2 ½" outer coat. Climate and living conditions affect the amount of undercoat present. Correct colors are blue & tan, solid sandy and solid red. The color of B & T's 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." * The reference to "all black body coat" is reference to solid black where the coat should be blue and not to a coat lacking tan markings. The topknot should be silver or a lighter shade than head color. *

When the dog is sent around the ring, it should move freely with good reach and drive. The front leg reaches well in front of the dog's body. The rear foot steps into the spot just left by the front foot; while this is happening, the other rear leg is extended back behind the body.

Seen from the front and rear, the legs are straight from the shoulder and hip joints to the pads, and move in parallel planes to the centerline of travel. The rear legs move in the same planes as the front legs. As the dog moves at a faster trot, the front and rear legs may tend to converge toward the centerline of travel, but the legs remain straight even as they flex or extend. * There should be no wasted motion and no bounce to the backline when moving. Australian Terriers should move with a ground covering stride. They were bred to be tireless workers able to cover rough terrain and great distances. This athletic ability is as important today as it was in the past.

In summary, the distinctive features of the Australian Terrier are:

Proportions: Back slightly longer than the dog's height from withers to ground; body long, distinctive keel, prominent forechest and buttocks;

Head long with flat skull slightly longer than wide, slight stop and muzzle of equal length.

Coat: Soft silky topknot of silver or lighter color than the head, ruff and apron.

Colors: Blue & Tan, Solid Red and Solid Sandy. .

Blue: silver blue, dark gray-blue, steel-blue, dark blue.

Solid Red: any color from light to dark red

Solid Sandy

Gait: Smooth and free with reach and drive.

*Australian Terrier Standard, approved by the American Kennel Club 8/9/88

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