The Australian Cattle Dog

A SHORT HISTORY

Settlers emigrating to Australia took their stock with them, along with the dogs that worked the stock. Most of their dogs were Smithfields, named for the Smithfield Meat Market in London, where they guarded pigs, chickens, ponies, sheep and cattle. These dogs were described as heavy, black, flop-eared and bobtailed with some white around the neck.

Farmers and cattlemen required loyal working dogs for their vulnerable herds. Their dogs imported from Great Britain were, indeed, good workers on small farms, but the vast, unfenced farms in Australia required a larger and stronger herding dog with greater stamina and more spirit – a so-called “living and moving fence.”

Timmins Biters

The first attempt to breed a silent cattle dog that didn’t bite as hard as the Smithfield was made by a cattle drover named John (Jack) Timmins (1816-1911), who crossed a Smithfield with a Dingo. The results were red bob-tailed dogs known as Timmins Biters. They were indeed silent workers, but proved to be ruthless biters and couldn’t be trusted with calves.

In 1840, Thomas Hall – one of the new landowners in New South Wales – imported a couple of blue smooth Highland collies. In *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1811) Thomas Bewick described the early collie as “A trusty and useful servant to the farmer and grazier. In the north of England [a cur] and the shepherd’s dog are called ‘coally dogs.’”

Hall’s next step was to cross the progeny of these collies with a Dingo. Hall’s collies were described as blue merle and resembled the old Border Collie and working Bearded Collie. The results of Hall’s crossings were blue or red merle puppies, first known as Hall’s Heelers and later as Merlins or Blue Heelers. Thomas Hall thought enough of Jack Timmins to allow him to have a pair of his Heelers, the only person outside the Hall family to be accorded that honour in Hall’s lifetime! 
A typical habit of these dogs was silently stealing up on the livestock. They bit or nipped the animal’s heel then immediately flattened to the ground to avoid an angry kick. Hall’s Heelers also had great stamina and withstood extreme temperatures – they were exactly what the farmers were looking for. For 30 years, until his death in 1870, Hall worked on his Highland collie-Dingo breed, laying the foundation for the purebred Australian Cattle Dog.

Spotted ‘Dingo-Collie-Heeler-Dalmatian-Kelpie’

In 1870, at the Sydney cattle market, butcher Fred Davis showed the crowds that his two Hall’s Heelers could do excellent work. Brothers Jack and Harry Bagust were impressed and bought some puppies from Davis. These puppies were crossed with an imported Dalmatian, but the result was not considered a success because herding ability decreased. However, the Bagust brothers were creative breeders; they crossed their spotted ‘Dingo-Collie-Heeler-Dalmatian’ with a black-and-tan Kelpie. The result was an intelligent dog and excellent worker that wasn’t too difficult to train and had a remarkable coat pattern. (Dogs with a spotted coat are more easily seen in the dark.) The Dingo-Collie-Heeler-Dalmatian-Kelpie is said to be the ancestor of the present-day Australian Cattle Dog. Some say that the Bull Terrier also contributed to this breed. The story goes that Fred Davis added some Bull Terrier blood to make the dogs more persistent.

Jack and Harry Bagust, Alex Davis (Fred’s son) and Robert Kaleski continued breeding Queensland Heelers or Queensland Blue Heelers, keeping only the puppies that proved to be close to the ideal type. The rest were put down.

Robert Kaleski’s breed standard

Robert Kaleski, breeding from the pure Hall line, recorded a great deal of information about the new breed and the breeders of his time.

Kaleski began breeding dogs as a boy of 16 and devoted his whole life, until 1961, to research and breeding. In general, 1893 – the year of the breed’s recognition – is seen as the start of the purebred Australian Cattle Dog. Kaleski wrote a book about the Cattle Dog (1914, reprinted in 1933), entitled Barkers and Biters. In this book, he described the Smithfield as a “big rough coated, square bodied dog with a head like a wedge, a white frill around the neck and saddle-flap ears.”

Kaleski described the breed as “speckled Heelers just like a small, thick-set Dingo except in colour.” Although Kaleski’s standard changed over the years, the essence can still be found in the present standard. The breed’s official name – Australian Cattle Dog – came into existence with the standard, but they were usually called Blue Heeler, Australian Heeler, Queensland Heeler.
The Australian Cattle Dog standard

The Australian National Kennel Club and CKC standards are nearly identical. The exceptions are:

Included in the ANKC standard but not in the CKC’s are the statements “the dog’s prime function, and one in which he has no peer, is the control and movement of cattle in both wide open and confined areas” (Characteristics); “the skull and muzzle on parallel planes” (Head and Skull); a warning or suspicious glint is characteristic “when approached by strangers” (Eyes); “... and pricked when alert, the leather should be thick in texture” (Ears); “As the dog is required to move difficult cattle by heeling or biting, teeth which are sound and strong are very important” (Mouth);

“The hindquarters are broad, strong and muscular. The croup is rather long and sloping, thighs long, broad and well developed, the stifles well turned...” (Hindquarters. The CKC standard says “moderate bend of stifle”); “... under no circumstances should any part of the tail be carried past a vertical line drawn through the root” (Tail); “stiltiness, loaded or slack shoulders, straight shoulder placement, weakness at elbows, pasterns or feet, straight stifles, cow or bow hocks, must be regarded as serious faults. When trotting the feet tend to come closer together at ground level as speed increases, but when the dog comes to rest he should stand four square” (Gait/Movement); “The outer-coat is close, each hair straight, hard, and lying flat, so that it is rain-resisting. On the head (including the inside of the ears), to the front of the legs and feet, the hair is short. Along the neck it is longer and thicker. A coat either too long or too short is a fault. As an average, the hairs on the body should be from 2.5 to 4 cms (approx. 1-1.5 ins) in length” (Coat); “Red markings on the body are permissible but not desirable” (Colour).

The CKC standard specifies that the head should be “blunt, wedge-shaped”; “The nose is black irrespective of the colour of the dog”; “Yellow eye is disqualified”; “Undershot or overshot jaw should be disqualified” and the neck should be “about 1/3 the length of the body.”

The combination of substance, power, balance and hard muscular condition must convey the impression of great agility, strength and endurance.
The Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog

A SHORT HISTORY

The history of the Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog is similar to that of the Australian Cattle Dog. Farmers needed a dog to protect, herd and drive livestock over great distances. At first, they used Smithfields, but they were ponderous and unwieldy, had trouble with the temperatures, were hard biters and barked too much.

and Red Heeler. In the U.S., the first breed club was The Queensland Heeler Club of America.

An intelligent and strong working dog tailored to his job and without any exaggeration, the Australian Cattle Dog still works with Australia's large cattle herds. The breed is also well known in the agility and show rings. The average lifespan is 12 to 15 years, but 'Bluey,' a 29-1/2-year-old Queensland Heeler, worked with the herd for 20 years!

The Australian Cattle Dog is the most popular native dog in Australia, but figures are declining. There were 4,008 dogs registered in 1986; 3,700 in 1989; 2,870 in 1991; 1,353 in 2001; and only 1,196 in 2004. In Australia, the breed is classified in the Working Group.

The Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog standard

The Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog is a well-proportioned working dog with a hard-bitten rugged appearance. He possesses a natural aptitude in the working and control of cattle and is ever “alert, watchful and obedient though suspicious of strangers.” The skull is broad and flat, “with a slight but definite stop. The oval shaped eyes are dark brown. His ears are moderately small, pricked and almost pointed. They are set on high yet well apart.” This is a true working dog, showing a neck “of exceptional length,” well-boned and muscular forelegs, a body with deep and muscular loins and a deep and broad chest. He has “broad, powerful and muscular hindquarters with well developed thighs.” His tail is “undocked, of a natural length, not exceeding four inches, set on high, but not carried much above the level of the back.” The outer coat is short, straight, dense “and of medium hard texture. The coat around the neck is longer, forming mild ruff.”

The colours of the Stumpy Tale are blue or red, a good even mottle or speckle with or without black markings on the head and body. Blues should not have any appearance of red and reds should not have any appearance of blue. Tan markings are not permitted under any circumstances. A cream or white undercoat is also a serious fault.

Movement is free, supple and tireless. A Stumpy Tail is a versatile dog; “capability of quick and sudden movement is essential.” Serious faults are “cow or bow hocks, loaded or slack shoulders, weakness at elbows and a straight shoulder placement.”

Height at the withers is 46-51 centimetres (males) and 43-48 centimetres (females).
The crossing of Smithfields, Dingoes and Collies to produce a silent worker was the start of the Australian Cattle Dog and of the Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog. The difference is... the Kelpie. Unlike the Australian Cattle Dog, the Stumpy Tail has no Kelpie blood, which means he lacks the black-and-tan gene. By selective breeding of bobtail to bobtail, taillessness is now fixed in the breed. Any tan in a Stumpy Tail indicates an Australian Cattle Dog or Kelpie somewhere in the pedigree.

In 1845, the breed was temporarily recognized and, in 1888, its survival was guaranteed when the Australian National Kennel Council opened a provisional stud book. The ANKC recognized the Stumpy Tail in October 1988 and opened a Development Register. To avoid registration of untypical Stumpy Tails, the ANKC set up a grading system with a panel of three judges.

Today there are three classifications: Fully Registered means the dog is from two registered parents; A Grade is given when one parent is not registered but the dog fulfills the points of the standard; and B Grade is for dogs that may not satisfy the standard, but have other qualities and differ from the Australian Cattle Dog.

A BREED IN ITS OWN RIGHT
Although the Stumpy Tail shares its early history with the Australian Cattle Dog, it’s a breed in its own right and certainly not a variety of the ACD.

The Stumpy Tail is a square dog, leggier than the ACD. He has a finer and more wedge-shaped head with ears set on higher. In general, he’s racier. He has less angulation than the ACD and tends to amble at slow gaits.

Relatively uncommon in the show ring, the breed is held in high regard in Australia as an intelligent, tireless – and silent – worker. Stumpy Tails are loyal and courageous, and managing the vast cattle farms would have been impossible without their dedication.

They work the same way as the Australian Cattle Dog: herding the cattle by nipping at the heels with a bite that is both low and silent. In general, a Stumpy Tail is strong, fearless and self-assured. Obedience training is a must as his intelligence needs harnessing.

Interest in this breed is stable now: 1,364 were registered in 1999; 1,355 in 2001; and 1,196 in 2004. The name “Smithfield” persisted for a long time; in the 1950s, a breeder in Tasmania exhibited his Stumpy Tails as Smithfields.

Although the Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog shares its early history with the Australian Cattle Dog, it’s a breed in its own right and not a variety of the ACD. The Stumpy Tail is held in high regard in Australia as an intelligent, tireless and silent worker.
When millions of acres of land in New South Wales and Victoria were released by the Australian Government for cattle pasture, large farms were established; some farmers owned more than a quarter of a million sheep. Building fences was far too expensive, so the farmers needed shepherds and dogs. In his book *Sheepdogs: Their Breeding, Maintenance and Training*, Dr. R.B. Kelley included text by Jack King, who claimed he could give a true picture of the creation and the development of the Australian Kelpie.

A certain Mr. Gleason (also spelled Gleeson), who lived in Victoria, owned a black-and-tan sheepdog bitch from imported stock of the Rutherford line; Gleason named his bitch ‘Kelpie.’

Around 1870, a certain Mr. Robertson had imported a dog and a bitch, ‘Brutus’ and ‘Jenny,’ from Scotland. The only thing we know about these two dogs is that

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**The Australian Kelpie standard**

An important item under General Appearance is that “it must be free from any suggestion of weediness.” A Kelpie must possess the capability of untiring work. He has a “mild, tractable disposition [and] any defect in his temperament must be regarded as uncharacteristic.”

The head must be in proportion to the size of the dog, “the skull slightly rounded and broad between the ears” – one of the characteristics shared with the Australian Cattle Dog and Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog. The stop is pronounced and the muzzle slightly shorter in length than the skull. The colour of the nose conforms to the colour of the coat. A Kelpie should have “a rather fox like expression, which is softened by the almond shaped eyes.” The colour of the eyes is brown, “harmonising with the colour of the coat.” In the case of a blue Kelpie, a lighter-coloured eye is permissible. The pricked ears are set wide apart on the skull.

The forequarters should be muscular with strong but refined bone, straight and parallel when viewed from the front. The hindquarters should show breadth and strength and a Kelpie’s croup is rather long and sloping. The body has a firm, level topline, the ribs are well sprung and the chest must be deep rather than wide.

The tail has a very slight curve, but during movement and excitement it may be raised a little. The tail reaches approximately to the hock. The coat is double. The outer coat is “close, straight, hard and lying flat,” the undercoat short and dense. Along the neck the coat is longer and thicker and forms a ruff. Coat colours are black, black-and-tan, red, red-and-tan, fawn, chocolate and smoke blue.

A Kelpie must be perfectly sound; cow hocks, bow hocks, loose shoulders, weaving or plaiting are serious faults. As it is a herding dog, the Kelpie must be able to turn suddenly at speed.

Height for males is 46-51 centimetres; bitches are 43-48 centimetres.
In 1898, on the night before the Kelpie ‘Coil’ was to defend his title for the highest number of points at a sheep trial, he had an accident with a taxi and broke a front leg. With the judge’s consent, Coil ran the trial anyway and earned the maximum points, setting a record.

Jenny had a long coat and semi-erect ears. Brutus and Jenny produced ‘Ceasar,’ ‘Nero’ and ‘Laddie.’ Ceasar and Kelpie produced a black-and-tan bitch, known as King’s Kelpie. To make the story a bit more complicated, Mark Tully gave Gleason, a black, smooth-coated male, ‘Moss,’ bought from Rutherford, who had imported Moss’s parents. The Rutherfords were immigrants from Scotland and imported dogs from their homeland on a regular basis. Moss was bred several times to Kelpie and to King’s Kelpie. ‘Laddie,’ son of Brutus and Jennie, was also bred to King’s Kelpie, and in one of the litters the bitch ‘Sallie’ was born. Sallie and Moss were the parents of ‘Barb.’ (Are you still with me?)

Because King’s Kelpie won sheep trials, her puppies were in great demand. Gradually her descendants became collectively known as Kelpies. Black Kelpies are known as Barbs. The names of the bloodlines refer to the most influential dogs or to their owners, for example, a Rutherford, a King and a Barb line.

This is the early history of the breed whose name derives from a sheepdog named Kelpie, which means “water sprite.”

**Workaholic**

The theory that Gleason’s Kelpie (without any doubt a dog with collie blood from northern England or Scotland) resulted from a crossing with a Dingo cannot be verified. Because the Kelpie and the Dingo bear a strong resemblance, and because both dogs show great stamina, people think that there must be a connection, which isn’t the case.

The Kelpie is a working dog that has no problems with a sunny, hot, dry climate. A sheepdog by nature, he can be trained to herd cattle. The Kelpie isn’t inclined to bite when herding or driving sheep, but barks a lot. Without the efforts of the Kelpies, the production of wool in Australia would be unaffordable. A Kelpie can walk and run 50 to 60 kilometres a day and it’s said that one Kelpie can do the work of two to six cattle drovers on horseback. A Kelpie is a workaholic, loyal, intelligent, dutiful, alert and sometimes a bit stubborn. Boredom is killing for this breed. The standard says, “it has a natural instinct and aptitude in the working of sheep, both in open country and in the yard.”

Although a breed standard existed in the 1870s, the Kelpie got its first official standard in 1902. In 1968, 678 dogs were registered; however the figures dropped in the 1990s – 442 in 1992 and 242 in 1999. In 2004, 207 Kelpies were registered, which means the breed’s popularity is now stable. The Working Kelpie Council is responsible for their registration.

**Next: The Australian Terrier and Australian Silky Terrier**

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