

A Short Global History of the Miniature Bull Terrier

The Miniature Bull Terrier has a history just as long as that of their bigger relative, the Bull Terrier, and each of these histories is deeply entwined with the other. With a common origin and an initial shared gene pool with not only the Bull Terrier but also the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, the Miniature Bull Terrier is a distinct breed characterised genetically by a gene expression, believed to be the IGF1 gene (the so-called 'mini-gene') which causes the reduced size they exhibit.

Great Britain

Like the Bull Terrier, the Miniature Bull Terrier originated in England. As far back as the First Great International Dog Show at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, in May 1863, Bull Terriers were the only dog breed to have more than one size class: including one for small Bull Terriers referred to as 'Bull Terriers under 10 pounds in weight'. In fact James Hinks, who bred and named the English Bull Terrier in the 1860s, showed a Bull Terrier in this 'Miniature' class at this show.

Rawden B. Lee, esteemed author of 'A History and Description of the Modern Dogs of Great Britain and Ireland' published in 1894, wrote that the Bull Terrier "could be obtained at any weight ranging between 4 lbs. and 55 lbs." At this point, Miniatures were a variety of Bull Terrier sharing the gene pool rather than being a separate breed. These smaller Bull Terriers grew in popularity before the turn of the century outdoing their bigger relatives at exhibition shows. Lee tells of a case where thirty-two Bull Terriers were entered in the class for 'under 15lbs' compared to only nineteen in the class for 'over 15lbs'. Interestingly, the first ever recorded Bull Terrier Champion, Mr. S. E. Shirley's Nelson, weighed less than 16lbs – these days he would be considered a Miniature Bull Terrier (albeit a small one!).

In 1898, even smaller dogs known as 'Toy Bull Terriers' were introduced and shown. One, named 'Pony Queen', reputedly weighed as little as 3lbs. But with almost no resemblance to their bigger cousins, they lost favour very quickly. In the early 1900s, Miniature Bull Terriers were shown with these Toy Bull Terriers in the same 'Miniature' class so the Miniatures suffered a similar decline in interest. Crufts show records reveal that from 1901 to 1918 only one individual Mini was shown in the 'under 30lbs' class. After the First World War the practise of breeding smaller Bull Terriers had almost completely died out, and the Miniature Bull Terrier was scrapped and removed from the Kennel Club register.

While the Minis disappeared from the show ring, they were still a favoured landowner's dog particularly for breeding to add courage to the working hunt terriers of the time. Colonel Richard Glynn wrote in 1936 "it is interesting to note that, to this day, some breeders of Miniature Bull Terriers never exhibit or register their dogs, but breed a recognisable Miniature Bull Terrier purely for sporting purposes". The breed registration was restored in 1939, thanks to the efforts of Colonel Glyn who, along with others, established the Miniature Bull Terrier Club the year before and then petitioned the Kennel Club to recognise the breed. This period of almost 40 years is very significant as it was a time of genetic isolation from the Standard Bull Terriers (who had claimed the show rings. Despite this, the same wording in the breed standard of the Bull Terrier was assumed for the Miniature with only a size restriction added. Initially it included a weight restriction (of 20lbs) but this was abandoned after a number of years in order to prevent what Colonel Glyn called "the underfeeding of 'border-line' specimens" and only the height restriction of 14 inches at the shoulder was used instead. With Challenge Certificates now available

to Miniature Bull Terriers, the first Champion, 'Deldon Delovely', (belonging to Mrs Gladys Adlam) became a champion in 1948. The United Kingdom is still the source of most Miniature Bull Terriers and while the Miniature Bull Terrier Club of 1939 is still very active, increased interest spawned another club, the Southern Miniature Bull Terrier Club, which was established in 1997.

North America

While some small-sized Bull Terriers had been imported to the USA even before the turn of the 19th Century, Toy Bull Terriers were last exhibited at Westminster Kennel Club Show in 1922 and Miniature Bull Terriers were last exhibited there in 1928. There was no activity with small Bull Terriers until May 1961 when Ralph and Ruth Gordon from Mississippi imported an English Champion Miniature Bull Terrier, 'Navigation Pinto', and a bitch called 'Freesail Simone'. In 1963, the Miniature Bull Terrier breed became eligible to be shown in the American Kennel Club (AKC) but only in the Miscellaneous Class. This class gives dog owners a place to exhibit but no opportunity to earn any points towards a championship. So, although the Miniature Bull Terrier Club of America (MBTCA) was founded in 1966, without proper AKC breed status, interest in Miniature Bull Terriers eventually dwindled. In the early 1980s, Mrs Barbara (BJ) Andrews, together with her husband, Bill, and friends, John and Pam Graves, imported four Miniature Bull Terriers from the UK kennel, Erenden. These were followed by more imports (including UK Champion, 'Erenden Eleanor') which were placed with serious dog fanciers around the USA and in Canada. The first MBT Speciality Show was held in October 1985, in Atlanta, Georgia, in conjunction with the Bull Terrier Club of America's Silverwood competition. AKC judge, Mrs Winkie Mackay-Smith, commented favourably on the number and quality of Miniature Bull Terriers, which had gathered from all over the country to compete. BJ and her fellow enthusiasts revived the Miniature Bull Terrier Club in America and as a reward for their efforts, acquired breed status for the Miniature Bull Terrier in 1991 – finally MBTs were registered as a separate breed in the AKC Terrier Group. Today the MBTCA has over 130 members, their own Van Hildrikheusen Trophy for the Best-American-Bred Miniature Bull Terrier and an enthusiastic and committed support base. The Miniature Bull Terrier Club of Canada was formed in 2009 to service the growing interest in that country.

Central and South America

Miniature Bull Terriers are still scarce in South America with no dedicated clubs but a few breeders in Brazil, Argentina, Peru and a number in Mexico.

Western Europe

Miniature Bull Terriers moved easily from the UK to Western Europe where they have become extremely popular. There are a number of registered breeding kennels in 14 countries in Western Europe: The Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Most of these countries have Miniature Bull Terrier members of their respective Bull Terrier Clubs but there is a dedicated Miniature Bull Terrier Club in Switzerland (Miniature Bull Terrier Club Schweiz) established in 1998 and two clubs in The Netherlands: Miniature Bull Terrier Vriendenkring established in 1997; and the Nederlandse Miniatuur Bull Terrier Club established in 2010 with a strict code for breeding healthy, purebred Miniature Bull Terriers.

Eastern Europe

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the resultant political changes in Eastern Europe led to an opening of trading that influenced the dog world. Miniature Bull Terriers have a fast-growing and very active following in Poland, Czech Republic,

Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Ukraine, Russia and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Asia

There are six countries in Asia with registered breeders of Miniature Bull Terriers. These are China, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and Japan but there are no clubs devoted to Miniature Bull Terriers in any of these countries at the present time. What is noteworthy, is that Miniature Bull Terriers in Japan are more numerous than Standard Bull Terriers. Statistics available from the Japan Kennel Club show that there were 440 000 registered dogs living in Japan in 2009, of these, only 12 were Standard Bull Terriers (number 122 on the list of popular dog breeds) while 208 were Miniature Bull Terriers (number 54 on popularity list!). This makes sense when the top 10 most popular dog breeds are all very small breeds – no doubt due to smaller living spaces.

Australia & New Zealand

The first Miniature Bull Terriers were imported into Australia in 1965 by Mr Wally Webster and Mr John Peek. These were 'Jetom Jasper' and 'Jetom Jubilant Tigress' both of which became Australian champions. Unfortunately due to the small population, lack of new imports, prohibition of interbreeding with Bull Terriers, and a tragic kennel fire, the breed died out barely 10 years after they had been introduced. The last litter was bred in 1971 and the last Miniature Bull Terrier shown in 1974. Nearly 13 years later, Miniature Bull Terriers were reintroduced with new imports from the UK. The first was 'Grandopera Ottello of Warbonnet', a handsome Tricolour, who arrived in the state of Victoria in 1986 and earned his Australian championship in less than a year later. In the New South Wales area, the first import, 'Erenden Roxana', made Australian history by winning 'Best in Show' at the British Terrier Club just two months after her arrival in 1987. Both parents of 'Roxy' were interbred Minis (the result of a Bull Terrier x Miniature Bull Terrier). Interbreeding was a practise introduced initially in the UK as a desperate measure to save the Miniature Bull Terrier breed from possible extinction due to the high prevalence of Primary Lens Luxation (PLL) in the population. Unfortunately, after her arrival in Australia, 'Roxy' was immediately interbred with a Standard Bull Terrier and this was the beginning of the present challenge to breed small-sized Minis in that country. However, Roxy's friendly and outgoing personality and striking black-brindle-and-white colouring won over many admirers and she proved to be an important ambassador for the breed. Miniature Bull Terriers have a loyal and devoted following in Australia. Although the interests of Miniature Bull Terrier owners were looked after by the Bull Terrier Clubs, particularly the 'Bull Terrier (and Miniature Bull Terrier) Association of Western Australia' and the 'Bull Terrier Miniature Club of Victoria', it is only recently that the 'Miniature Bull Terrier Breeders Association of Australia' was formed. This happened in 2008 with an increased need to monitor health concerns and to breed responsibly.

The first Miniature Bull Terrier imported to New Zealand was 'Scharsdale Mini Maroi' from Australia followed closely by 'Coldstream Statesman' from the UK. More Miniature Bull Terriers moved from Australia to New Zealand and back again in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their popularity in New Zealand was short-lived though due to health concerns and a decline in imports with the last litter born in 1996. Ten years later there was a resurgence of interest, with new imports and two new litters born. The Miniature Bull Terrier Club was formed on 2005 to re-establish the breed in New Zealand.

South Africa

According to the Kennel Union of Southern Africa (KUSA), 12 Miniature Bull Terriers were registered in South Africa before 2005. The first Miniature Bull Terrier in South Africa was a

one year old, red-and-white male called 'Neptune of Upend', imported from the UK in 1954 by Mrs Cowell. He was obviously a pet as 15 years elapsed before any further Miniature Bull Terriers were imported to South Africa.

In 1969, Mrs Elizabeth Sarak, who was living in Bloemfontein at the time, received a red-and-white dog, 'Seggieden Kirbeon Juan', and a brindle bitch, 'Seggieden Harpers Littesadie' from England. Mrs Sarak's son, Ronnie Rylie, remembers the Miniature Bull Terriers as being "poor, whippety, specimens with very destructive behaviours". Mrs Sarak showed the pair but KUSA rules at the time prevented her from winning CCs with them as there were too few members of the breed in the country. This, coupled with their difficult behaviour, caused Mrs Sarak to re-home them after she moved to East London in the Eastern Cape Province.

In 1974, Mrs Dorothea (Dot) Sandalls imported a white bitch called 'Kirbeon YumYum' from England. 'YumYum' was a daughter of the famous CC-record-holding Miniature Bull Terrier of the time, 'Kirbeon Bandmaster' and YumYum's subsequent progress in South Africa was even recorded in the Dog World Annual back in the UK. The following year, Dot imported a black-brindle-and-white dog called 'Lenster Little Conductor' ('Gulliver'), and a white bitch with red markings called 'Mermaid of Lenster' ('Nellie') who was already a UK champion. Dot lived on a farm outside Vryheid in Kwa-Zulu Natal with her family and just six months later, she bred 'Gulliver' and 'Nellie' to produce a litter of three puppies. The only female puppy, 'Majorette of Sunduza', was bought by Andre Strydom of Sunduza Kennels in Johannesburg. He remembers her as a "real little pest that attacked anything that moved". Andre showed her but unfortunately she died before her second birthday, one CC short of being a champion when she was trampled to death by a cow that she had attacked.

The other two puppies were both males and remained registered in Dot's name. Dot turned both 'Gulliver' and 'YumYum' into champions in 1976 but unfortunately she passed away soon after this and according to her husband, all the dogs were sold. Sadly, whoever bought them never registered them in their name so their destiny is unknown.

In September 1995, two Miniature Bull Terriers were brought into South Africa's northern neighbour, Botswana, from the UK. They belonged to Mr and Mrs Allsop who were working on a contract in the frontier town of Maun. The two brindle-and-white Minis were 'Zedbees Zarab' (a year-old male) and 'Pikaljo Prism' (a 3-year-old female). The next year the Allsops bred their dogs and only one puppy, 'Boronyani Lucky Lady', was registered as belonging to a Maun resident. Three years later when the Allsops returned to the UK, they left the dogs behind in Botswana and no further records were kept.

Back in South Africa, renewed interest in Miniature Bull Terriers occurred ten years later, with the importation of four Minis by Johan and Stephenette du Toit of Lusahn Kennels near Malmesbury, north of Cape Town. Over a period of a year, they brought in a 14 month old brindle male called 'Little Chili Peppers Pole Position' ('Eddy') from Germany, a two-year old white female called 'April Snow of New Galloway' who was originally from France, and two young female puppies, 'A Koffee Kid' and 'Double Dutch', the last three from Thea Jacobs of From Friar's Point Kennels in The Netherlands. Lusahn Kennels have since produced a number of litters of Miniature Bull Terriers, most of whom are treasured companions in pampered pet homes.

At this present time, there have been a number of more recent imports: Klaus Eckstein imported a red-and-white bitch, 'Little Chili Peppers Ballroom Blitz', from Germany, Paul

Visagie imported a white bitch, 'Homoki Favorit Tecquila' and a brindle-solid male, 'Millenium Angels Face/Off' both from Hungary. Gerhard Smith has a white female from the USA ('Spotlight's Anna Blaauw') and Tracey Butchart imported a red-and-white bitch, 'Irgen Gold CzaCza' from Russia and a white male, 'Ali G Wanted Bulls', from Poland. Hopefully these Minis can assist in building a healthy South African gene pool.

Miniature Bull Terriers face additional health challenges to those of Standard Bull Terriers. While sharing heart and kidney concerns, the overwhelming issue for Minis has always been Primary Lens Luxation (PLL). Luckily there is now a DNA test available which has revealed a prevalence of 65% occurrence of the PLL gene mutation in the world-wide population. It is no wonder that PLL almost extinguished the breed in the past but at least now it is possible to breed Minis that will not go blind. Miniature Bull Terriers also suffer from fertility and whelping problems and this, combined with small litters, make breeding them a slow and arduous process.

The scarcity of Minis in South Africa has spawned a number of scams involving these dogs. There are some unregistered dogs advertised as Miniature Bull Terriers in South Africa but these seem to be descendents of small, local Standard Bull Terriers rather than any of the original imported Miniatures. It is unlikely that they are descendents of Dot Sandalls' imports as it has recently come to light that both of her imports, 'Gulliver' and 'Nellie', were affected by PLL and it is almost certain that any offspring of these Minis, including the ill-fated, Majorette, would have also gone blind by the time that they were 4 or 5 years old.

In summary, it is true to say that, globally, the Miniature Bull Terrier has never been in a better position. Popularity is rising as people turn to smaller dogs to match their modern lifestyles. Progress in science and technology is resulting in more sophisticated genetic and health tests. Advanced systems of communication and transport allow breeders access to further-flung gene pools than ever before. The future for this special breed is indeed bright!

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