

The Past and the Future

This past spring at the United States Australian Shepherd Association National Specialty I had the opportunity to sit and talk with a long time fellow Aussie breeder. We had both separately come to the same conclusion earlier that day... that this National specialty had the most consistent depth of quality that we had seen at any National specialty to date. There would be no resting on the laurels of the past for anyone to remain competitive in the future.

The strides our breed has made in uniting both more consistent breed type and sound movement (an important hallmark of our breed), by all the fanciers involved, is to be commended.

We were also both struck with all the new faces in the breed, as well as the growing popularity of Aussies as evidenced by the increasing number of dogs being registered and competing at shows over the years. While the increased interest is encouraging, it also has a sobering side as well.

As the Aussie breed fancy gets larger, it is easier for important information from the past to be lost or grow dim. The reality is that a healthy future depends on knowing about the past. You may ask why?

One reason the past is important is to understand where the dogs came from and what purpose they served. While most people who own Aussies do not use them for herding, the traits needed for a useful all around herding and farm dog are the traits that make an Aussie an Aussie - both physically and mentally. The various parts of an Aussie from head to stubby tail all serve a purpose. Whether you are breeding or judging keep this thought ever before you. If it doesn't look like an Aussie *and* have the soundness to go out and do its job all day long, then perhaps it warrants a second thought as to whether that dog should be part of a breeding program or in the ribbons. A dog can be both beautiful and functional.

Another important reason to explore the past is to understand the history that lies in our Aussie pedigrees. What most people who are newer to the breed may not realize is that most modern day Aussies, and in particular the show lines, go back to a handful of highly inbred dogs from the middle of the last century. At first glance a pedigree might appear to be a group of loosely line bred dogs, but further research beyond what is on the page will reveal a different picture. Spending time studying old photos and pedigrees, besides being a fascinating history lesson; will be a real eye opener as to just what a small gene pool we are working with. A five generation pedigree simply will not do.

All of this information can be very valuable not only for improving physical characteristics, but also in trying to help avoid genetic problems. Knowledge of the Aussie's genetic history can be especially vital to the future, as it can help breeders make wise decisions in their breeding programs based on what is best for the breed, not on what dog is currently winning.

As we look forward to a strong and healthy future, let's remember the past. The future is in your hands.

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