

The Rat Terrier is a very active, healthy dog that requires an equally on-his-toes owner to keep pace with this dynamic companion dog.



HISTORY OF THE RAT TERRIER



The feisty terrier! An expression heard so often in terrier talk, one might believe it was the name of an actual breed! But, down through the ages, only one terrier officially had the boldness and tenacity to claim the name as its own. The distinctive Feist originated in England in the 1820s. But even in England, his beginnings were more reflective of America's "melting pot," the country in which he later was developed as a distinct pure breed. Like the Americans who embraced him, his colorful ancestry was a "bit of this and that." Historians say that he was a cross of the Smooth Fox Terrier and the black and tan Manchester Terrier. But they go

DOCKING THE TAX

Over 200 years ago, English laws came into effect stating that dogs that worked for a living were exempt from tax. Working dogs were distinguished by the docking of the tail. The practice of tail docking on Rat Terriers has always been done to prevent risk of injury as they work.



EAR CROPPING

Ear cropping consists of surgically trimming the ear leathers and then training the ears to stand upright. The Rat Terrier's ears are never cropped. Originally, cropping was done to prevent the ears from being bitten by any adversary. With fighting dogs and terriers, cropped ears gave the opponent less to hang on to. Ear cropping also was considered important for cosmetic purposes, as it gives the dog a very smart look. In the US, dogs can be shown with cropped or natural ears, as is the case in most European nations. American breeders concentrate on the stylish look of cropped ears, which they believe give the dog's head a more appealing, sharper look. In fact, at most shows in the US, it is more difficult to do top winning with a dog with natural ears, though some pet owners favor the natural look.

back even further to those oldest breeds that comprise these two breeds and gave the Feist its uniqueness: the English White Terrier, now extinct, adding mild manner, gentility and nobility; the Black and Tan Terrier, adding hearty demeanor and keen senses; the Bull-and-Terrier, supplying feistiness, tenacity and stamina; and the Hinks' White Bull Terrier, creating true grit and gameness. The resultant new breed had coloring like the Manchester, black

body and face with tan trim on his cheeks and tan spots over the eyes. Demonstrating fearless tenacity, this hybrid became known as a Feist—a perfect title for this small, smart, hardy varmint dispatcher!

The breed won British fanciers almost immediately. This was a versatile dog, resourceful and determined, with a generous nature. Master of the hunt in the fields, the Feist also caught the eye of those in the less scrupulous sport of rat baiting. At that time, terriers were often pitted against other terriers, but the Feist's natural instinct to kill vermin created a new "sport." The dog was placed in a pit and hundreds of rats were poured down. Bets were wagered as to how many vermin the Feist could dispatch within a specified time. As ratting competitions became the favorite social events of royalty and commoners alike, many fell in love with this small terrier. But perhaps most captivated were the many American visitors who had never seen such a dog. The first Feists, or "ratting terriers," in the US appeared during the 1850s and '60s, but the vast majority of imports arrived in the 1890s. Old England's favorite ratter was about to become a truly American breed.

By the turn of the 19th

century, the United States was outgrowing its adolescence. Frontier living was giving way to civilized society and even country dwellers were no longer protecting their homes from bear! Hunters who had previously used bulldogs and curs for protection and guard now desired a dog that could trail and tree small game. The first Rat Terriers (Feists) were exclusively black and tan colored, ears buttoned over, medium-sized and approximately 18 pounds. Gaining popularity in the southern parts of the US, these imports easily adapted to different climates and terrain. They kept farms free of rats and fox and proved to be excellent hunters. From squirrels to cougar, they were quick, fierce and lethal.

But American Rat Terrier enthusiasts saw room for improvement and for the next 30 years, the Feist would be bred based primarily on function. Form would be a product

of its purpose and development. The breed, in fact, underwent a process that would take it far from its original form in England.

Breeds were added to the Rat Terrier dependent on geography and required purpose of the dog. Those seeking a good hunting dog with more desire to be a companion brought about the re-introduction of the Smooth Fox Terrier, turning the breed into the black and white tricolored dog we see today. To further enhance his hunting prowess, he was crossed to the Beagle with its topnotch scenting ability. A stockier body and shortened legs were also favored for going to ground. With the addition of the Whippet and the Greyhound, breeders got a speedier hunter with better sighting ability and a slightly elongated body. They also added a wonderful range of new colors: red, liver, chocolate, brindle, black fawn and cream. But perhaps most important, these gentle breeds produced a mellower Feist, the temperament we see in today's Rat Terriers. Over time, the Chihuahua, Toy Fox Terrier and Toy Manchester were introduced to bring down the size considerably, accounting for the toy variety commonly seen today and also for new colors. These three toy breeds are, in

ABOUT 357 RATS PER HOUR

The Rat Terrier is astounding in his ratting abilities and the breed came to be known as the prince of the rat pits. Developed in Great Britain to be quick and fierce in the hunt, one ratting terrier named Billy was believed to have killed 2,501 rats in 7 hours in Suffolk!

THE TOY FOX COMPARISON

Given the many shapes and sizes of the Rat Terrier over its history in the US, the breed has often been confused with other breeds like the Jack Russell Terrier (which is not as refined as the Rat Terrier) and the Toy Fox Terrier. This latter breed is indeed similar in some respects, but different in many others. The Toy Fox Terrier never weighs over 7 pounds, while the giant Rat Terrier can weigh as much as 35 pounds; albeit the toy variety can weigh a mere 4 to 6 pounds. The outline of the Toy Fox is squarer than the longer body of the Rat Terrier, and the topline slopes slightly, which is not a characteristic of the straight back of the Toy Fox. There are also differences in the eyes and ears of the two breeds. The Rat Terrier has V-shaped ears that can be erect, tipped or button, while the Toy Fox are always erect and set more to the sides. The eyes are more obliquely set in the Rat Terrier, compared to the forward placed eyes of the Toy Fox.



fact, considered among the most influential of the breeds added to the makeup of the Rat Terrier. The new improved breed was indeed a winner! The Rat Terrier was a hunter with a 100-yard range—hunters could follow on foot while he trailed and treed small game; he was a watchdog with keen sight and smell; and, finally, he was what his breeders and fans fervently pursued—a devoted and generous companion dog.

Changes in place, this newly

Americanized little terrier was positioned for prestige. He found it in the home of America's "royal family." In 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt moved into a White House infested with mice and rats. The mansion was filled with traps and poisons, but the vermin seemed immune. Little did Teddy Roosevelt realize he was naming a breed when he set his favorite trusty little Feist terriers on the case! Ridding the White House of pesky vermin,

AMERICAN HAIRLESS TERRIER

For over three decades, a variety of hairless Rat Terriers has been in the making. The beginnings of this variety traces to Willie and Edwin Scott of Louisiana, who encountered a hairless mutant in a litter of Rat Terriers. This pup, called Josephine, was bred to produce more hairless progeny, a feat that was finally accomplished after several litters. Trout Creek Kennel was established in 1981, after nine years of concerted effort by the Scotts.

Unlike other hairless dogs such as the Chinese Crested and Mexican Hairless who have tufts of hair on their heads, feet and tail, the hairless Rat Terrier is completely bald, except for his whisker and eyebrows. All hairless breeds suffer from skin problems (due to the lack of coat and the exposure to the sun). Poor dentition is another characteristic of most hairless breeds, though the hairless Rat Terrier possesses a very strong compliment of teeth.

The American Hairless Terrier, the name reserved for these dogs, possesses a recessive gene for hairlessness, which differs from the genetic base for other such breeds that have a lethal dominant gene. The coated Rat Terrier, however, is still used in hairless breeding programs from time to time. Until a sufficient gene pool is established, the hairless Rat Terrier continues to be a "work in progress." The UKC will recognize the American Hairless Terrier when this goal is finally reached.

Depending on the association with which your Rat Terrier is registered, a hairless Rat Terrier may or may not be shown. The Rat Terrier Club of America does not permit such dogs to compete, while the UKC-affiliated American Rat Terrier Association does allow the hairless variety to participate. For more information on the hairless variety, contact the American Hairless Rat Terrier Club.

this sporting little breed earned the name it has today—“Rat Terrier.” The dog named Skip, Roosevelt’s favorite, was the perfect companion to keep up with this high-energy President. On the hunt or in the home, this loyal ratter never left his side.

The breed’s popularity soared throughout the 1930s and ‘40s. They were so common on American farms that it seemed there was one on every porch! But by the 1950s, the family farm was undergoing major changes. Pesticides and new poisons, along with mechanized farming, displaced the need for a “common farm dog.” Along

The Jack Russell Terrier is often confused with the Rat Terrier. Jack Russells appear in smooth and wire coats.



SKIP IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Probably the most famous Rat Terrier in American history was Skip, constant companion of President Theodore Roosevelt. He helped rid the White House of a rat infestation but was most treasured for his ability to keep up with the President’s high energy level and passion for the hunt.

with a growing public interest in pure-bred dogs, the Rat Terrier was in jeopardy of suffering extinction—the fate of his oldest ancestor, the Old English White Terrier, the dog that all of the present English terrier breeds have descended from.

But the tenacious Rat Terrier held on to its following. Years of skilled and devoted breeding had produced a utility dog that both sports people and dog-loving families were determined to keep by their side. This small number of loyal breeders continued to breed for working skills, type and temperament. Utilizing outcrosses when necessary, this “breed of many breeds” was more than saved, and his attributes were refined and perfected. Historically, an excellent, energetic friend of the hunter, by the 1990s, his intelligence, loyalty and genetic soundness have made him a perfect companion for the pet owner. The Rat Terrier has made an amazing

comeback. In the US, there are not only highly active breed clubs but also a recognized standard. Having made the leap from “strain” to recognized breed on January 1, 1999, the Rat Terrier was officially recognized by the United Kennel Club (UKC).

As a “breed of many breeds,” it is perhaps not surprising that today’s Rat Terriers are often individual in both looks and characteristics. Due to limited breeding stock, many Rat Terriers were bred to other breeds of dogs such as Toy Fox Terriers, Chihuahuas and Jack Russell Terriers. The infusion of these breeds produced a Rat Terrier with short legs and a longer body; this variety is called the Teddy Roosevelt Terrier. While it retains the same desirable characteristics as the longer legged Rat Terrier, inter-breeding of the two varieties is discouraged and the Teddy Roosevelt Terrier has a separate standard, which also was approved by the UKC in 1999.

The UKC also recognizes a variety of hairless Rat Terriers. These dogs are free from hair except for whiskers and guard hairs on the muzzle and eyebrows. In 1972, the first hairless Rat Terrier was born to Willie and Edwina Scott of Louisiana. A coatless puppy in a



FARMHAND FOR HIRE

Throughout the 1930s and '40s, practically no farm was without one of these trusty little dogs then called the “squirrel dog” and “old-time fox terrier.” To many a farmer, this alert, loyal and tenacious utility dog was simply top farmhand!

litter of normal-coated siblings, “Josephine” was prized by the Scotts, and after a nine-year effort, this little female whelped a final litter that included two hairless and two coated puppies. This “blessed event” became the basis of Trout Creek Kennel and a full-scale breeding

program of hairless terriers. Today, the hairless Rat Terrier bloodlines still require carefully planned mating to coated Rat Terriers.

In the United States, the breed is currently shown in the UKC as a variety of the Rat Terrier, but hairless terrier fanciers anticipate the time when the breed's gene pool will be sufficient to present these "hairless cousins" as its own breed. Already given an official name—the American Hairless Terrier—the breed now has its own club in America. The American Hairless Rat Terrier Club has a very active membership and keeps fanciers busy with its own special events, while awaiting UKC approval of separate breed status.

The other variety of smooth-coated, compact "Feisty" terriers traditionally comes in three different sizes, Standard, Mid-Sized and Toy. But for UKC conformation shows, the Rat Terrier is divided into two varieties: Miniature, not exceeding 13 inches, and Standard, not exceeding 18 inches.

It is noteworthy to mention yet another strain of Rat Terrier, the larger Decker, developed by a sportsman enthusiast from Oregon. In 1970, Milton Decker, an avid hunter, began his own hunt for a Rat Terrier extraordinary—a strain that would

UNDERCOVER HUNTERS

During the Middle Ages, commoners were prohibited from hunting in the royal forests. If found, they would be severely punished. However, their crafty Rat Terriers—easily hidden and savvy in evading capture—were perfect hunting dogs. Many a poor farmer was kept from starving by his loyal terrier companion.

become his "ideal" of an already ideal dog. Decker saw this perfection in his large Rat Terrier, Henry, a 32-pound dog as eager to please his family in the home or on the hunt. Traveling across the United States, Decker sought the largest Rat Terriers he could find for breeding stock. With precision and patience, a strain was created that retained the large size, plus "super-sized" the other traits that makes the Rat Terrier so prized—from natural hunting instincts to extreme intelligence to quiet demeanor.

To be considered a Decker, the dog must carry the original Decker bloodlines throughout its pedigree. The standards are the same as the Rat Terrier but the strain possesses its own particular "look" in skull (slightly rounded and broad on top between ears), muzzle (wedge shaped and squaring at the nose) and ears (erect, usually by ten weeks of age). With colors of



Whether Standard or Miniature, Rat Terriers think they are king-sized dogs with no task or foe too large!

A TOUCH OF THE "IG"

The Italian Greyhound cross gave the Rat Terrier an elongated body, a calmer temperament and the skills of the sighthound. If not for the cross, Rat Terriers would be almost identical to the Jack Russell Terrier. Breeders work to maintain the sweet easygoing nature of the Rat Terrier.

black/white/tan, tan and white, or black and tan, the Decker strain can range from 16 to 19 inches in height and from 22-40 pounds in weight. Decker enthusiasts say that the strain has the same character and devotion to its family as the Rat Terrier, but it can be a bit more aloof and independent.