

## History of the Rat Terrier

**The Rat Terrier is the original feisty terrier that so many other breeds are often described as.**

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, 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 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 dogloving 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 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 smoothcoated, 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 extraordinaire—a strain that would 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 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.

Excerpt Comprehensive Owner's Guide: Rat Terrier