

Miniature Schnauzers

This little breed has a relatively short history and some larger relatives.

By Eve Adamson

The Standard Schnauzer may have come first. The Giant Schnauzer may come in a much larger size. But the Miniature Schnauzer, well, he rules — at least in popularity. In his short but peppy history, the Mini has enjoyed a meteoric rise, consistently hovering in or near the top 10 most popular breeds in the United States. Credit his sparkling personality, his scruffy charisma, his convenient size, his deeply rooted affection for the people in his life — whatever the reason, the Miniature Schnauzer is here to stay.

But a mere 150 years ago, the Miniature Schnauzer, at least as we know him today, didn't even exist. While certain 15th century German paintings feature dogs that look similar to Miniature Schnauzers, these were likely smaller Standard Schnauzers — an established working dog, herder, hunter, guard dog and all-around farmhand well before anybody thought to create a smaller version of this stocky, wiry farmer's helper.

"They don't have a terrifically long history," says Wyoma Clouss of Boise, Idaho, the judges education chairwoman for the American Miniature Schnauzer Club and an American Kennel Club-licensed terrier judge. "They started in the late 1800s, from the Standard Schnauzer, which has a long history of his own.

Considering the fact that the Miniature Schnauzer is a direct descendent of the Standard Schnauzer, it makes sense to begin by taking a quick look at the Mini's big brother, to more fully understand where the Miniature Schnauzer really began.

Standard Origins

The prototypical schnauzer comes from Germany and has probably been there for hundreds of years. Distinguished by a wiry gray or black coat, a beard and bushy eyebrows, the schnauzer has a unique look that resembles but doesn't quite match any other breed. "Schnauzer actually means 'the breed with a beard on the muzzle,' the German word for muzzle being 'schnauze,'" Clouss says. That 'stache and crazy eyebrows, as well as abundant coat on the dog's underside, probably helped shield the Standard Schnauzer from weather and protect him while hunting, too.

Breed historians believe the Standard Schnauzer most likely came out of crossing German Pinschers with black German Poodles and gray wolf spitz (a type of German spitz dog with a wolf-colored coat), although nobody knows for sure because there are no reliable records of the breed's creation. But the Germans loved the schnauzer and worked with him, not only on the farm but in the marketplace, where he guarded produce stands and personal property. Some even served in the German army and police force. The Giant Schnauzer, the last of the schnauzer breeds to be developed, probably arose from crosses to black Great Danes and shaggy German herding dogs, to create a protection dog and a cattle driver.

As often happens when a dog is much beloved, people decide they want a smaller version as a pet — a dog who would inherit all the great qualities of the original dog, but who would be more portable and family-friendly. "People in Bavaria [the southernmost and geographically largest German state] didn't keep close written records at the time," Clouss says, "but what I've been able to determine is that the Standard Schnauzer was crossed with the Affenpinscher, which was also called the monkey dog. There were a lot of Affenpinschers around during the late 1800s, so this would have been easy to do. This brought the [schnauzer] down in size."

Some early records do record litters from these crosses. "They would pick puppies by color and coat texture: 'This one looks like an Affenpinscher; this one looks like a schnauzer; this one looks like a Miniature Pinscher,'" Clouss says. "They were in the process of developing the schnauzer to be a house dog, personal companion and barnyard ratter." But the first Miniature Schnauzers varied dramatically in look. Some really did look more like Affenpinschers or Miniature Pinschers. Some came out black and tan, or yellow, as well as salt-and-pepper or black. Only through careful selective breeding did a

little dog finally appear that reliably resembled the Standard Schnauzer.

The wolf spitz probably contributed to the Miniature Schnauzer's signature salt-and-pepper color, as well as the rough-textured coat. The Miniature Pinscher and the Affenpinscher probably contributed that get-the-critter mentality, as well as a smaller size. Clouss believes that the Affenpinscher also contributed a shorter, monkey-type face in some of the original dogs.

"Early Miniature Schnauzers had a shorter muzzle, but breeders worked to lengthen the muzzle so it is as long as the top skull," Clouss says. "Anything that looked like an Affenpinscher wasn't the look they wanted. The Miniature Schnauzer first appeared in a German dog show in 1899, and people took notice."

The American Mini

Officially, the first Miniature Schnauzers came to America in 1924, although some Minis certainly came over before then. "There were people in the 1920s who would say, 'Oh, yeah, my grandpa had one of those little farm dogs,' so we know they were here before the 1920s," Clouss says. "We just don't have any records of it."

In 1925, the American Kennel Club lumped the Standard and Miniature together as a single breed, which they called German Wirehaired Pinschers. "They were all judged together back then," Clouss says. "They weren't even considered separate varieties."

This began two decades of AKC schnauzer musical chairs. In 1926, the AKC shifted the German Wirehaired Pinschers to the Terrier Group and changed the name to Schnauzer, but still kept the two sizes together. In 1927, they split the two sizes into two varieties: the Miniature and the Standard. But in 1931, they put them back together as a single breed with no varieties. In 1933, they split them again, but this time, into two completely separate breeds. The parent club governing the breed also split into two separate clubs. At this time, both remained in the Terrier Group.

Skip ahead 12 years, when the AKC moved the Standard Schnauzer into the Working Group. "The Miniature Schnauzer was denied working status," Clouss says. "And while I don't know why for sure, I suspect it was due to size. The Miniature Schnauzer club did not want their breed in the Toy Group, so they stayed in the Terrier Group."

Since 1945, Standard and Miniature Schnauzers have stayed put, even though not everyone worldwide agrees that the Miniature Schnauzer is a terrier. The Canadian Kennel Club puts the Miniature Schnauzer in the Terrier Group, but England's Kennel Club groups both the Standard and Miniature Schnauzer in the Utility Group, rather than the Terrier Group. The Kennel Club describes the Utility Group as consisting "of miscellaneous breeds of dog mainly of a nonsporting origin," which includes such breeds as the Bulldog, Dalmatian and Poodle — similar to the AKC's Non-sporting Group. The Federation Cynologique Internationale, an international registry which Germany follows, groups them in the pinscher and schnauzer group (Group 2), a completely separate group from the terriers (Group 3).

The look of the Miniature Schnauzer was changing, too, and never more dramatically than with the appearance of a very special Mini bred by Dorothy Williams of Doreem Kennels: Champion Doreem Display, who lived from 1945 to 1959, according to Clouss.

"He was what we consider our first super sire," Clouss says. "He produced 42 champions, and virtually all of our show dogs today trace back to Display. He was our first Best In Show winner at an AKC event in 1946, and we consider Display to be the one who changed the look of the breed to be more like how we consider Miniature Schnauzers today."

With Display's influence, those early Miniature Schnauzers showing more Affenpinscher influence quickly became obsolete. Display looked more like a Standard Schnauzer, but in a smaller size, and had the stocky, substantial body, longer muzzle, and beautiful wiry coat we so value in Miniature Schnauzers today. In Display, the modern Miniature Schnauzer had come to fruition.

Plentiful Schnauzers

In the United States, breeders don't exchange dogs very often with Germany, the Miniature Schnauzer's country of origin. "In Germany, their breed standard is different and the German judges are looking for different things than we look for in the North American Schnauzer," Clouss says.

Instead, the United States and Canada do a lot of back-and-forth Miniature Schnauzer breeding. "The North American style of Miniature Schnauzer is very popular in Canada, England, some parts of Europe, and in China, Taiwan and Japan," says Clouss, who recently judged a dog show in Beijing. "In China, you aren't allowed to own a dog more than 14 inches tall, so the Miniature Schnauzer is perfect. When I was judging, outside the ring they were having a pet play day, and there were probably 50 or 60 pet Miniature Schnauzers there. People were having a ball visiting, taking pictures, having schnauzer races. The dogs were dressed up. They have been around the world because they are such an easy breed to keep."



Although the Miniature Schnauzer has never taken the top prize at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show or starred in a Hollywood blockbuster movie or otherwise scored any major notoriety beyond making sure their favorite people are amused, comforted and never lonely — that, when it comes right down to it, is all we have ever asked of the Miniature Schnauzer. And we consider that a job well done.