

## **THE MINIATURE BULL TERRIER – A LOT OF DOG IN A SMALL PACKAGE**

By Jane Peakin

(Taken from a breed feature in Dog World 2007)

When you first see a Miniature Bull Terrier, there is really nothing else it could be other than a Bull Terrier. The head shape is probably the most distinctive one in the canine world but it often elicits the comment that the person didn't know the Miniature Bull Terrier existed. The original Miniature Bull Terriers were selected for size from Bull Terrier litters and were considered a neat companion and ratter. The first show for Miniature Bull Terriers was at the International Dog Show, Islington, London in 1863 and although the weight limit there was under 10lbs it is interesting to note that by 1883 this had been raised to 25lbs. The first Bull Terrier champion, Nelson, made up in 1873, owned by Mr S E Shirley, the first Chairman of the Kennel Club, would have been considered a miniature today and weighed under 16lbs. A toy variety was also shown in the early days of the breed, but these died out due to the extreme difficulty in maintaining type in a weight restricted variety and unfortunately in 1918 the Miniature Bull Terrier was removed from the Kennel Club Breed Register. Thankfully a few stalwarts of the breed continued to keep the Miniatures going and after a dark phase of 20 years or so a group of enthusiasts formed the Miniature Bull Terrier Club in 1938 with the objective of a height limit of 14 inches, and initially a weight limit, which was later abolished. This gave us the breed standard we have today which states the Miniature Bull Terrier should not exceed 14 inches at the shoulder with the impression of maximum substance to the size of dog but that the dog should be at all times be balanced.

Minis have come a long way from the early days and have enjoyed unprecedented success in recent years. Registrations have increased in the past 10 years from 103 in 1997 to currently around the mid 200 mark. The breed is listed on the KC vulnerable native breeds list, but the Miniature Bull Terrier is well served by dedicated breeders who take great pains to place puppies in the correct homes as well as protect and improve type, temperament and health. The Miniature Bull Terrier's temperament is generally not a cause for concern and they tend to be quite equable, sometimes the defender, sometimes the clown, although it must be remembered that they are a terrier breed and therefore require consistent, calm and disciplined handling. Thankfully, Minis are not currently included as a dangerous breed under the Dangerous Dogs Act and I hope that this will long continue. The main factor in separating Miniature Bull Terriers from the more obvious dogs listed as Dangerous breeds has always been the very distinctive shape of the head, which makes it difficult to mistake for any other breed. The main propagators of the Deed Not Breed movement are working very hard to maintain this status quo and the Miniature Bull Terrier Club's website holds a good section on this.

The Kennel Club have allowed various rounds of interbreeding, initially started in the 1970s and continuing to this day and several talented breeders have taken up the challenge. Interbreeding has improved a lot of things in the Miniature Bull Terrier, not least in lessening the impact that the dreaded Primary Lens Luxation was having on our breed. Size is still something that needs to be worked on, but size always has been and always will be a challenge when attempting to perfect a breed which has a height restriction and is numerically small, especially with the added bugbear of a hereditary disease to conquer. I take my hat off to those breeders who have persevered with health testing and interbreeding as I really do think has been the only way for the breed to improve and limit the damage of PLL whilst a DNA test is being formulated. The main health issue facing Mini breeders has long been Primary Lens Luxation, but due to a breakthrough by the Animal Health Trust over the past few months, they are significantly closer to developing a DNA test for Miniature Bull Terriers. Once we have this I hope that all breeders make the most of the AHT's considerable hard work and test their stock prior to breeding, which will enable us to eradicate this awful condition.

In the show ring Minis have gone from strength to strength, now competing alongside their contemporaries, taking group placings and even a Terrier Group in the last couple of years – something previously unheard of. Type, conformation, movement and above all balance have all improved considerably and I believe that this is the reason that Minis have started to gain success in the group ring. For me this has been largely due to the judicious use of interbreeding with standard Bull Terriers. Slowly but surely, shoulders are improving, far fewer dips behind the withers are seen and front and rear angulation are in some cases surpassing the standard BT's.

Long may the Miniature Bull Terrier enjoy success in the show ring and good health outside it there are two descriptions I have always liked which give a perfect overall impression of this breed. The motto of the Miniature Bull Terrier Club “Multum In Parvo” –please excuse me if my Latin is a little rusty -which translates loosely as “a lot of dog in a small package”, and a phrase I heard some time ago that a Miniature Bull Terrier is like a two year old in a dog suit, both convey the essence of the Miniature Bull Terrier. This is a special breed for special people and long may enthusiasts for this unique breed continue.