

# The Reason Why Breeds **Change**



1970



2020

By  
Andrew  
H. Brace

Adapted for Australian Shepherds by Paula McDermid

“I wonder how often we—as breeders, exhibitors or judges—stop to consider how easily we become accustomed to changes within a breed?”

In some cases these changes can actually become so engrained in a breed that they are elevated to the level of desired characteristics, even though they might be quite alien to typical and necessary, and actually at odds to the relevant Breed Standard. It is generally the case that such changes begin with dogs shown by well-known exhibitors or handlers, as these so often set the benchmark that others gladly follow.

**How do changes come about?**

They begin with the breeder who produces a litter that gets to an age where the puppies need to be evaluated. The breeder who fully understands his breed is looking at every puppy in terms of the Breed Standard and what is correct for the breed. In most breeds “moderation” is a requirement that is desirable in many aspects, and it is the consistency of moderation throughout any animal that will contribute significantly to its balance, and the impression that everything fits and flows.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL WILDHAGEN

1970 Breed champion with performance titles.



2010 Breed champion with performance titles. During his show career he was moderate when compared to the competition.

“However, occasionally there will be a puppy who has something about it that always catches the eye, and invariably that “something” tends to be an exaggeration of some kind or another...”

... too long a neck, too short a back, too refined or overtyped a head, excessive rear angulation ... and here is where the danger lies. The totally steeped-in-the-breed breeder will see this exaggeration for what it is and will discard the guilty puppy as being alien to correct type.

Many others, possibly less experienced and less committed to THE BREED, however, will be realistic enough to acknowledge that the exaggeration, which is constantly catching his eye, will also catch the eye of the judge when the dog hits the show ring. And so the puppy is kept, nurtured, schooled and groomed.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY HAWLEY

1970 Breed champion, CD, STDc, OTDd.



DOWNNEY PHOTO BY GREG

2010 Breed champion, CDX.

“As soon as a dog whose type deviates from correct starts winning, the ball is set rolling.”

That dog appears in the big ring and other judges comment on its great bone, long neck, fabulous angulation, ultra-short back, high tailset, fantastic profile, great open side-gait or whatever, even when these may not be breed-specific attributes.

They reward it when they get it, and others follow suit. In due course breeders see this dog and all the winning it is doing, and they think that they had better start breeding something like it. They rush off to use said dog, and within a matter of years the rather deviant type has got a foothold in the breed.

It takes a little time, but soon judges arrive at a situation where they get a class of six dogs – five of them are of the “new” rather off-beat type; one is completely correct. The knowledgeable and constructive judge will know enough about the breed to be able to say with conviction “This one is right – the others are wrong” and judge accordingly. Many other judges,



1970 Moderate bone, moderate feathering.



2010 More bone, more feathering on legs.

however, perhaps lacking depth of knowledge of that breed, will take the easy option, assume that the five must be right as they form the majority, and the sixth dogs gets left out of the awards.

This particularly applies to size in a breed. So many of our breeds have, over the years, got bigger, maybe because of improved nutrition, and very gradually size has crept up. As we only routinely measure or weigh a handful of breeds that have more than one variety determined by size this increase is barely noticed.

However, when some dedicated breeder puts in the ring a dog that is of absolutely correct size in terms of its Breed Standard it is criticised by other exhibitors as being small. In truth, this is the correct sized dog, it's just that the others are noticeably over size.

At this juncture the dedicated breeder who has always been intent on maintaining type and simply intensifying quality begins to get, with good reason, frustrated. He knows what he is breeding is correct, but the numbers of those who are drifting away from type are such that other breeders, exhibitors and judges seem to be going with the flow, and he is left swimming upstream.



1970 Moderate angulation, level topline.



2020 Excess angulation, sloping topline.

This has happened in several breeds in Britain and beyond, and I have seen many “old time” breeders reduce their exhibiting activities dramatically, simply because they feel it is pointless showing dogs under judges who just don’t understand breed priorities. Yet these are the very breeders who SHOULD have stock in the ring, so that those who do have independent minds can see and appreciate it.

“When dogs with major faults – usually of the ‘attractive’ kind – continue to win and be bred from, newer breeders will see no reason to correct and improve. Why should they?”

These dogs are winning. Those who own the “modern” dogs can usually talk the talk, and provide convincing arguments as to natural evolution and obvious improvement. In some cases strong-minded individuals can actually be instrumental in persuading breed clubs to change the breed standard to fit these new dogs ... a heinous crime in anyone’s book. And then of course there is the power of advertising!



1970 Working type bitch and breed champion.



2020 Working titled bitch and breed champion. Beautiful example of present-day moderate bitch.

“Sadly, many of the breed changes we have witnessed are pleasing to the average eye – so what if a dog is too necky, too hairy, too upright, too short, too long? It looks pretty and the judges like the look!”

With the overwhelming influence of social media, it becomes all too easy for a dog that is fundamentally untypical, lacking in several essential breed points, to be elevated to the status of “stunning”. Beautifully photographed, impeccably groomed, the “flat catcher” attracts countless “Likes” and before you know what’s happened it becomes a celebrity. As such dogs are invariably photographed with their handler, those judges who base their decisions on Facebook research (yes, it happens!) contribute to its winning record and breeders whose main goal is simply to win consider using this dog at stud, thus the downward spiral continues.



1970 Working farm dog and breed champion.



2020 Working farm dog and breed champion.  
Excellent example of present-day moderate dog.

There is a further area of concern where temperament and character is concerned and this applies particularly to the strong-willed working breeds that may be basically “hard” in temperament. Whilst the show ring is no place for vicious or aggressive dogs there are certain breeds that, if they are to remain true to type, need to maintain their guarding instincts and these can still be shown effectively if they are properly under control. What is not desirable is to have the basic character bred out of these breeds so that they just become another companion dog.

Although showing dogs is today, in truth, more about chasing Challenge Certificates, ribbons and points than it is about preserving breeds, the show ring should remain the breeders’ shop window. It would be sad to think that genuine breeders who are keen to maintain true breed type could not find the dogs necessary to perpetuate correctness in the next generation.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORJEAN HERTZWIG

1970 Efficient trot.



MONIQUE GAUTREAUX PHOTO

2020 Efficient trot.



## About the author

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ANDREW BRACE's first pedigree dog was the Boxer he owned at the age of eleven. After modest success with Boxers, he turned his attentions to the Toy breeds, notably Pekingese in which breed he made up his first Champion.

Subsequently his TRAGBAND affix became more associated with Beagles and Afghan Hounds, his Beagle bitch CH. TOO DARN HOT FOR TRAGBAND for many years holding the all-time record for CCs won in the breed. Andrew first awarded CCs in Pekingese in 1977, judged his first Toy Group at Championship level in 1981 and became the UK's youngest All Breeds Championship Best in Show judge in 1988.

He is the author of several specialist books including the much acclaimed THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO JUDGING DOGS. With Anne Rogers Clark he co-edited THE INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF DOGS. He was Consultant Editor of DOG WORLD weekly newspaper for which he wrote a column for more than 30 years. Andrew was a regular interviewer for DogWorld.TV. and is a regular contributor to several canine periodicals including K9 NEWS in the UK, DOG NEWS in the USA, DOG NEWS AUSTRALIA and AIKEN NO TOMO in Japan.

Andrew Brace has been approved by the Kennel Club to award CCs in more than 90 breeds across all the groups, and judges all Groups as well as Best in Show. He has judged extensively overseas, officiating across Europe, in the USA, Canada, many countries in South America and Africa, China and Oceania.

He has judged at many premier shows including Crufts, Westminster, the American Kennel Club National Championship and several FCI European and World Shows. Andrew regularly gives seminars at home and overseas on a variety of canine topics.

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AFTERWORD BY PAULA MCDERMID

## Dilemma

How do we rein in exaggeration in our breed when it is attractive and wins in the show ring? How do we encourage breeders to return to “moderate”?

### Is breed evolution good or bad?

#### The reality of Aussie evolution

Mr. Brace clearly outlined the process of breed “evolution” in this insightful article *The Reason Why Dog Breeds Change*. His words struck a chord in me because my breed, the Australian Shepherd, has changed significantly since I bought my first purebred Aussie in 1980. I created this e-book to show the changes in breed type from the 1970s until today. It was a bit shocking even for me to see these photos side-by-side; breed evolution creeps in slowly but surely over time. Those changes have not necessarily been for the better.

#### Aussies have evolved into three “camps”

There are Aussie fanciers who focus solely on winning conformation shows. Other breeders focus primarily on producing dogs with powerful herding instinct. There are breeders in these “camps” that lean toward exaggeration, be it too much or too little bone, coat, or head; others work hard to preserve moderate breed type. There are also people who breed Aussies that can win in the show ring, herd livestock, and excel at canine sports—they understand the need for moderate breed type.

#### Why does preserving breed type matter?

Simply put, dogs who do not conform to the breed standard become just another generic show dog or generic herding dog. As a friend of mine remarked when he saw a tiny toy dog on a leash, “If you want a hamster, get a hamster!” If you want to breed Aussies, they should look and behave like Aussies.

## Why does it matter that Aussies stay true to their original purpose?

The traits of the Australian Shepherd breed were galvanized by more than a century of dogs who worked hard in difficult conditions. The result was a moderate dog who was supremely athletic, intelligent, and trainable. These are traits that define the breed as much as specific physical qualities and are traits that should be preserved in every generation. Without these traits the breed will devolve into just generic pretty dogs.

## How can we as breeders resist the temptation toward exaggeration?

Think about why the breed standard was written as it is and the practical applications. For example, dogs with excess rear angulation and a sloping topline are winning in the show ring now. Many people want to win, see that dog winning, then breed for those traits, which creates a trend; newer people believe that is normal for the breed. The next generation of puppies may have even more exaggerated angulation which then becomes fashionable. However, when some of those puppies are sold to “performance” people, the dog might break down physically, perhaps suffer an ACL rupture, because excess angulation is useful for winning shows, but not for functioning in the real world. The same is true for sweeping sidegait, blocky heads, and other exaggerations in structure.

## Perspective

### Dogs breeds are not an accident

Since the advent of the dog-human bond, humans have selectively bred dogs for specific purposes: hunting, guarding, herding, etc. The most talented and capable males and females were crossed and the puppies who had more of the desired traits were kept to produce the next generation. Over time those traits were set firmly and specialized breeds were created, based on a **functional** purpose.

### From function to fashion to commerce

The first modern dog show was held in England in 1859—only 160 years ago—and dog shows rapidly became fashionable. There was

controversy at that very first show because dogs were assessed on their “look and shape rather than their abilities in the field.”<sup>1</sup> Clever marketers who were not interested in preserving the functional capabilities of the breeds saw an opportunity to raise the value of top winning dogs, their stud fees, and their puppies. Winning dog shows became the priority for many breeders and functionality became less important. Breeds were changing to serve these desires.

## Reality check

### **Dog breeds evolve to suit the particular desires of humans. Human desires change.**

Early ancestors of Australian Shepherds were recorded in the late 1800s. During the 1900s there was much interbreeding with other strains of herding dogs to produce desired herding characteristics. As the traits of these dogs became clearly defined, the Australian Shepherd breed was born. In 1957—just over 60 years ago—the first Aussie was registered by the Australian Shepherd Club of America and in 1958 ASCA held its first dog show—where entrants were judged on their appearance rather than their ability to herd livestock.

As people discovered this new breed, they realized that many of the traits which were developed for herding transferred perfectly to dog sports, and Aussie fanciers enthusiastically jumped into canine sport competitions. Now there are breeders who selectively breed Aussies for these sports, not for conformation shows or herding. And so the evolution of the Australian Shepherd breed continues, adapting to new and different human desires.

1. Information about Victorian-era dog shows from “The Surprising history of Victorian dog shows” by Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, Published June 24, 2009 in the *BBC History Magazine*.

COVER PHOTO ON LEFT: DOUG MACSPADDEN