

Dachshund Breed History



One of A Kind

While the Dachshund cannot claim the ancient lineage of other breeds, there is agreement among enthusiasts that the Dachshund is one of a kind. With its unique outline and broad array of coat color and patterns, it is also one of a very few multi-purpose hunting breeds that can do it all - go to ground, track, flush game and retrieve.

So where did the Dachshund come from? The word 'Dachshund' was initially general term to describe any number of dogs that were used to hunt vermin above and below ground in Germany and elsewhere across Europe. Etchings from the late 1500s depict images of dogs referred to as 'badger dogs', but in no way do these resemble the Dachshund today.

The Early Years in Germany

The first description of a dog that resembles a Dachshund appeared in 1700, with animals described as low in stature with long slender bodies and somewhat bent front feet. These dogs came in various colors with a Smooth coat. In 1719, a book titled 'The Complete German Hunter' illustrated two dogs that represented a breed similar to a Dachshund. In 1812, the first description comparable to a Wirehair appeared. A few years later, the first reference to a Longhair appeared. In 1836, the first portraits appeared of the Smooth, Longhair and Wirehair varieties. They were depicted with both straight and crooked legs. Colors ranged from yellow, brown and black along with dapple and brindle patterns. Breeders crossed coats regularly, focusing on the dog's hunting ability and coat best suited to the local terrain.

By 1879 the breed had become very popular in Germany and for the first time, a list of desirable characteristics was established. These characteristics form the foundation of the breed standard used by the Dachshund Club of America today. A standard for the Longhair was written in 1882 with principal points that the coat be similar to a Spaniel and that colors should be the same as the Smooths. As early as 1797, Wirehairs were produced by crossing Smooths with Dandie Dinmonts, or by crossing Smooths with Wirehaired Pinchers. These early Wirehairs were used solely for hunting without concern for a standard set of traits. However, in 1883, a Wirehair named 'Mordax' owned by one of Germany's active breeders helped to gain public interest.



Dachshund Breed History, continued



By 1888 German breeders formed their first breed club, 'The Tekel Club', and established its own stud book and requirements for registration. This was possibly one of the most important moments in breed history, as it attempted to purify the breed. Only dogs without major faults could be registered, and to further define the three varieties, the registry would not accept dogs whose parents were not of the same coat variety. By 1895, the breed increased in popularity in Germany not only as a working dog but as a pet. Dog shows had been introduced and attracted the interest of new Dachshund owners. Dachshunds with more length of body and shortness of leg became the winning look at major dog shows, deviating from the hunting style. For several years, breeders of the hunting dog type and show type split to form different clubs and registries, but finally reunified in 1909 as the Association of German Working Dachshund Clubs.

Dachshunds in Great Britain

Although the breed originated in Germany as a hunting dog, Great Britain took the breed into its hearts and homes as pets. British royalty were likely among the first to own Dachshunds. Queen Victoria owned 'Dashy', and Prince Albert hunted woodcock with a brace of Dachshunds.

The first Dachshund made its appearance at a dog show in 1870. There were no separate classes for the breed, and it did not do well in the miscellaneous classes. Over the next few years, as more dogs were bred and shown (often by royalty), the number of Dachshund classes increased, as did the public's interest in the breed. The Dachshund Club was formed in 1881, a full seven years before its German counterpart, and with its own breed standard.

The English standard called for a dog that was houndy, large sized, heavy built, with loose skin around the throat and feet and crooked legs. The German standard called for a dog more terrier-like, smaller in size, more agile and clean-cut. The forelegs were not as crooked and the back was more level. As more good quality German dogs made their way into British kennels, the original British standard became obsolete and the German standard was adopted.

Coming to America

Both German and British Dachshunds were imported to America beginning in the 1880's, but it was the German imports that dominated at dogs shows until the start of World War I. The best German dogs were often owned by German nobility, so buying them was often a challenge. Thankfully a small group of breeders in the Midwest and on the East coast acquired enough good breeding stock to give American Dachshunds their start.

Dachshund Breed History, continued



A few of these early breeders include George Semler of New York City, whose 'West End' kennels between 1906 – 1910 were declared by experts in Germany, Austria and Great Britain to be among the best Dachshunds in the world. He acquired the best German bloodlines and used them successfully with his homebred dogs. Dr. Carl Folkens, who rarely showed his dogs, was highly regarded by his German counterparts and imported the very first Wirehair to America. Lastly, there were Harry Peters, Sr., the artist G. Muss-Arnolt and Dr. Montebacher, a doctor and chemist from New York City. Dr. Montebacher used space under the shelves of his drug store to kennel his Dachshunds. These three were the driving force behind the formation of the Dachshund Club of America in 1895, with Mr. Peters as its first President. Thanks to their efforts, the Dachshund Club of America is the eighth oldest member of the American Kennel Club.

Hard Times

The outbreak of World War I (1914 – 1918) brought hard times for our breed. The war spawned hatred for anything German; food, people and the Dachshund. Many Dachshund kennels stopped breeding. Owners who were brave enough to appear in public with their dogs called them 'Badger Dogs', hoping to escape persecution. But nothing spared them. A well-known breeder of the time recalls another breeder was attacked so often that one day he went out to his kennel and shot every one of his dogs.

Resurgence

The name "Badger Dog" stuck with the breed until 1923, when it was officially restored to Dachshund. Only 23 Dachshunds were registered with AKC that year, but by the end of the 1930s, registrations climbed to over 3,000 a year.

Many returning soldiers brought Dachshunds home from Germany as pets. American breeders looked to Germany for good dogs, but issues within the German Tekel Club made importing and registering those dogs a challenge. Instead, American breeders turned to British kennels with well established bloodlines which were easily registered with the American Kennel Club.

The Dachshund Club of America also survived the war and averted a potential split in the 1930s by placing field trials under full control of the club to address concerns from a group within the club that believed the hunting Dachshund should be the breeder's goal. But it was apparent that breeders, owners and exhibitors preferred the show dog with emphasis placed on type, structure and temperament. They recognized that Dachshunds needed to have the fire and spirit to perform well in the ring but be friendly and outgoing to make them easy to handle. Selectively removing some of the sharpness of the hunting dog resulted in the courageous but versatile dog that we know today.

Dachshund Breed History, continued



The Miniatures

Miniature Dachshunds were in demand by hunters and city dwellers long before the first few were registered in Germany in 1902.

Although true dwarfs appeared occasionally in Standard Dachshund litters, breeders believing they were 'runts' either destroyed them or sold them as pets to city dwellers. The prestige of participating in dog shows appealed to many city dwellers, and small dogs won as often as larger dogs. As a result, there was great interest in dogs that could live easily in an apartment setting. The dwarfs sold as pets found their way into the show rings, and as success came, so did the desire to selectively breed them as true Miniatures of the Standard Dachshund.

At the same time a group of hunter - breeders concerned with the increasing size of the Standard Dachshunds appearing in the show rings, began selectively breeding a smaller, lighter dog that could hunt in a variety of underground conditions, including the sandy soil in north Germany where Standards were often trapped in burrows by cave-ins. These dogs were higher on leg with a fierce hunting ability and could also follow rabbits and other small game underground. Some of these breeders were not willing to take the long path of selective breeding, so bred the smallest Standard Dachshunds they could find to any one of the toy breeds. These crosses looked something like a Dachshund, but also had toy characteristics such as bat ears, light bone, flat forechest and the desire to sit in their owner's lap - not exactly the hunting dog they desired. Many of these crosses found their way into pet homes, and for a short time into the show rings. Eventually, the Dachshund/toy crosses disappeared as did the taller, sharper hunting type. The surviving true Miniatures became the foundation of today's dogs.

Looking into Future

The Dachshund is a unique and distinct breed thanks to the efforts of dedicated breeders who established the breed over a relatively short period of time. The mission of today's breeders is to honor the breed's history, stay true to its original purpose, and steward the breed into the future.

References:

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