GROUP IV: TERRIERS

RUSSELL TERRIER

RECOGNIZED: 2025

Effective: July 2016

The breed standard outlines the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed, and ensures that a dog can carry out its original purpose. Breeders and judges should be mindful to prioritize dogs that are healthy and sound in both mind and body.

ORIGIN & PURPOSE

The Russell Terrier originated in England and was developed for use in the sport of foxhunting, using parallel breeding strains from Reverend John Russell's original fox working terriers in the early 19th century. The Russell Terrier is still utilized today as a working terrier. Two distinct breeds evolved from similar backgrounds. The Russell Terrier is short in stature, with distinctly rectangular shape, yet not so long as to be prone to back injury; and the Parson Russell Terrier is a taller dog, with a body silhouette appearing squarer.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

The Russell Terrier is a strong, active, lithe, predominately white-bodied working terrier of character with a flexible body of moderate length and rectangular profile. The overall dog must present a balanced image with no one part exaggerated over another. The Russell Terrier is full of life and moves with confidence that matches his keen expression. Coat may be smooth, broken or rough and may have tan and/or black markings with no preference for coat type or markings. Tail docking is optional.

TEMPERAMENT

An alert, lively, active, keen terrier with a very intelligent expression. The sporting character of the Russell Terrier is that of a spirited and game hunter. Their intensity for life is one of their most endearing traits. They are playful, curious, loyal and affectionate. Sparring is not acceptable.

SIZE

In size the Russell Terrier measures from 25.5 to 30.5 cm (10 to 12 in). Substance and weight should be proportionate to height, being neither too coarse nor too refined. The body is proportioned marginally longer than tall, the silhouette representing a distinct rectangle when measured from the point of shoulder to point of buttocks than from the withers to the ground. The height and weight descriptions indicate a sturdily built yet balanced dog with smooth muscle transitions, able to traverse narrow tunnels. There may be slight differences between dogs and bitches. Dogs should look masculine while bitches should look feminine. However, both sexes must adhere to the breed standard. When viewed in profile the midline of the dog is at the elbow and the bottom of the brisket.
Severe fault: Any hint of achondroplasia.

COAT

May be smooth, broken or rough. Must be weatherproof: All coat types have an undercoat and a harsh outercoat. Coats are preferably natural and unaltered. The conformation underneath is the same with no preference being given to any particular coat type. The belly and underside should be well covered. The terrier is shown in its natural coat with minimal grooming. Sculpted furnishings are to be severely penalized.

Smooth: A dense short, coarse smooth hair with an undercoat. ***Broken:*** Intermediate length hair, between smooth and rough, usually with facial furnishings and possibly a slight ridge down the back. ***Rough:*** Harsh and dense hair with an undercoat. Not thin, woolly, curly or silky.

COLOUR
White is predominant, with black and/or tan markings. There is no preference to markings so long as the dog remains 51% white. Tan can vary from lemon to mahogany. Ticking is acceptable.

HEAD
The ***skull*** is flat and of moderate width gradually decreasing in width to the eyes and then tapering to a wide muzzle, that narrows slightly to the end maintaining very strong jaws. The ***stop*** is well defined with minimal falling away under the eyes. The length of ***muzzle*** is slightly shorter than the length of the skull from the occiput to the stop. The cheek muscles are well developed. ***Nose:*** Black and fully pigmented. ***Ears:*** Small V-shaped button or dropped ears carried close to the head of good texture and great mobility. The points of the ears are even with corner of the eye and pointed downward. The fold is level with the top of the skull or slightly above and forms a straight line when alert. ***Eyes:*** Dark, almond-shaped with a keen expression of alertness. Eyes must not be prominent. Eyelid rims are to be fully pigmented black. ***Bite/teeth:*** The bite is a scissors bite with comparatively large teeth. A level bite is acceptable. Missing and broken teeth due to terrier work should not be penalized. The lips are black and are tight fitting.

NECK
A clean, strong neck tapering gradually into the withers is required for terrier work. The neck is of sufficient length to allow the terrier's mouth to extend beyond its forepaws when working.

FOREQUARTERS
Shoulders are well laid back and not heavily loaded with muscle. The ***upper arm*** should be equal or nearly equal to the length of the scapula forming an approximate 90° angle. This assembly allows for sufficient length of upper arm to ensure the elbows are set under the body, with the sternum clearly in front of the point of shoulder. Proper reach matched with equal drive allows for efficiency of movement. ***Forelegs:*** Forelegs are straight in bone from the elbows to the toes whether viewed from the front or the side with a slight angle to the pastern from the side. Legs are moderately well boned. The depth of the body from the withers to the brisket should equal the length of foreleg from elbows to the ground. **Severe faults:** Benched or bent legs, leg length either less/more than the depth of body.

BODY
The body of the Russell Terrier is proportioned marginally longer than tall, measuring slightly longer from the withers to the root of the tail than from the withers to the ground. The overall presentation is a compact, harmonious rectangular silhouette, in sound athletic condition. From the withers to the bottom of the brisket should represent 50% of the distance from the withers to the ground. The ***brisket*** should never fall below the elbow. The ***loins*** are short, strong and well muscled. The tuck-up may be described as moderate. Scars incurred while hunting are not to be penalized. ***Topline:*** Level while in motion. There is a slight arch of loin, from muscling that is felt rather than seen. ***Chest:*** The small oval-shaped, compressible chest is the hallmark of the breed and is the single most important attribute the Russell Terrier must have, allowing it to work efficiently below ground. It must be compressible and small enough to be spanned by an average-sized man's hands, approximately 35.5 to 38 cm (14 to 15 in) at the top set. ***Ribs*** are to be well sprung from the spine, tapering on the sides forming an oval shape so that average-size hands of an adult can span the girth behind the elbows. The chest must never fall below the elbow. **Severe faults:** Incorrectly shaped, unspannable, uncompressible chest falling below the elbow.

HINDQUARTERS
Muscular and strong; when looking down on the dog, the width of the hindquarters is equal to the width of the shoulders. Angles are equal and balanced front to rear. The ***hind legs***, when viewed from a rear standing position, are parallel. The ***stifles*** and low-set ***hocks*** are well angulated, allowing for good driving action. ***Feet:*** Both front and hind are moderate in size, oval-shaped, hard padded with toes moderately arched, turning neither in nor out.

TAIL

The tail is set high enough so that the spine does not slope down to the base of the tail. Customarily, if docked, the tip of the tail should be level with the top of the ears. When moving or alert, the tail may be straight or with a slight curve forward and is carried erect or gaily. When the dog is at rest, the tail may drop.

GAIT

Movement must be unrestricted and effortless, while exhibiting an attitude of confidence. The dog must always be exhibited and gaited on a "loose" lead. On the lateral, the dog must exhibit equal reach and equal drive. When moving down and back at slower speeds the dog must parallel track. As speed increases, feet tend to converge toward a centerline of balance.

FAULTS

Any departure from the aforementioned ideals shall be considered faulty to the degree in which it interferes with the health and well-being of the dog and the breed's traditional purpose.

Severe faults:

- Any hint of achondroplasia
- Benched or bent legs, leg length either less/more than the depth of body
- Incorrectly shaped, unspannable, uncompressible chest falling below the elbow

DISQUALIFICATIONS

- Height under 25.5 cm (10 in) or over 30.5 cm (12 in)
- Prick or semi-prick ears
- Blue eye or eyes
- Overshot, undershot, wry mouth
- Nose: Any colour other than black, not fully pigmented
- Less than 51% white, brindle colouring, any other colour than listed above