

ORIGIN OF THE KELPIE

The foundation of the Kelpie breed is now well documented. The breed originated from the intermixing of the progeny of three pairs of 'Working Collies' imported into Australia by three early landholders. The foundation female, born of black and tan working collies on Mr George Robertson's 'Warrock' Station on the Glenelg River, Victoria, eventually came into the possession of Mr J.D.'Jack' Gleeson, who named her Kelpie. "Jack" Gleeson was employed on the Murray's 'Dunrobbin' station, which adjoined 'Warrock' Station, at the time of Kelpie's birth. Leaving 'Dunrobbin' shortly afterwards he worked on 'Ballarook' Station where he broke in Kelpie to sheep work. He then accepted the position of overseer on 'North Bolero' Station in the Merool [now Ardlethan] district of New South Wales.

Whilst crossing the Murrumbidgee River on his way to take up the position he met an old friend, Mr Mark Tully. Mr Tully gave him an all black dog named Moss, who had been bred by the Rutherfords on their 'Yarrowonga' property from stock imported from their family in Scotland. Kelpie was mated to Moss and whelped a litter shortly after arriving at 'North Bolero'; this mating was highly successful and a great line of dogs evolved.

Messrs Elliot and Allen of 'Geraldra' Station near Stockinbingal, not far from 'North Bolero', had imported from Scotland a pair of black and tans collies, Brutus and Jenny. Mated on the voyage out, Jenny whelped a litter shortly after their arrival. In the litter of black and tans were two red pups. Caesar, one of the black and tan male pups, was given to Mr John Rich of 'Narriah', a property which adjoined 'North Bolero'. Gleeson's Kelpie was subsequently mated to Caesar and a black and tan bitch pup, named Kelpie after her dam, was given to Mr C.T.W. King. The outstanding performance of King's Kelpie at the first Sheep Dog Trial conducted at the Forbes Show, New South Wales, resulted in the eventual naming of the Breed. At first, dogs of the strain were known as 'Kelpie's pups', but by the turn of the century the majority of dogs of "Kelpie-like" appearance were described as Kelpies regardless of origin.

Gleeson's Kelpie' was mated on numerous occasions once to Caesar and several times to Moss with outstanding results and the progeny came into the hands of the landholders in the Merool district and were greatly interbred.

A female (a Caesar x Gleeson' kelpie) was mated to Caesar's litter brother Laddie to produced Sally. Sally, when mated to Moss, produced The Barb, an all-black dog like his sire, who gained his name from the racehorse which won the Melbourne Cup. For many years his descendants were known as 'Barbs' and even today many people persist in describing black members of the family in this way. The original Barb was a blend of the same strains that established the breed now known as Kelpies.

King's Kelpie', when mated to Moss, produced a number of outstanding dogs. From this line came Clyde who, when mated to Gay, a bitch bred by Mr Willis and acquired by Mr John Quinn from the Beveridges of 'Dollar Vale' Station, Junee, N.S.W., produced one of the most famous of all Kelpies - a blue dog called Coil. Mr Quinn won the first Sydney Trial with Gay in 1896 and in 1898 won the event with Coil, scoring the ultimate 200 points. Coil's performance is even more remarkable when one learns that he made the second run with a broken foreleg.

Mr Quinn's achievements, first with Gay and then with Coil, established the popularity of the strain for both trial and station work, a popularity which has remained ever since. A little later Messrs King and McLeod established their famous Stud on the bloodline of King's Kelpie, mixed with dogs purchased from Mr Quinn. After the turn of the century Messrs King and McLeod introduced new imported blood into the established strain, something for which they are often criticised. Mr Quinn continued to breed strictly within the strain until his death in 1930's.

Of the original pairs imported only the Rutherford strain dogs made a name for themselves in their own right. These dogs had been bred by the family in Sutherlandshire, Scotland, for a great number of generations, and they appear to have been immediately suitable to the hard Australian conditions.

Since the turn of the century the majority of 'Kelpie-like' dogs have been described as Kelpies whether they were directly traceable to the foundation or not. There is little question that the Kelpie is an Australian version of the short and/or smooth coated 'Working Collie', the foundation being mainly black and tan or black dogs carrying very little white. At the same time the Border Collie was usually referred to as the black and white rough-coated Working Collie.

The very restricted intermixing of the strain in the early days established the strain to a large extent; being closely bred they would have tended to dominate when out crosses occurred. Down through the history of the Breed, when out crosses have been made the progeny have been returned to the foundation strains, and this has no doubt minimised the loss of breed characteristics. Selection from the beginning was for a sheepdog that could cope with the conditions. This having been obtained with the early crossings the features have been rigorously retained.

The modern, top quality Working Kelpie is traceable to the early foundation stock in the 1870's. He is a short-coated, prick-eared dog who revels in hard going. Established specially for local conditions he is able to muster huge areas under extreme conditions, often having to do without water for hours on end. Derived from a long line of dogs and capable of handling thousands of sheep at a time, the Kelpie has a highly developed ability to solve problems for himself, and actually prefers to do so. Like the modern Border Collie, the majority shows a fair degree of eye and style. However, the Kelpie rarely 'claps' or goes flat to the ground, preferring to manage his sheep in a standing or crouching position.

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