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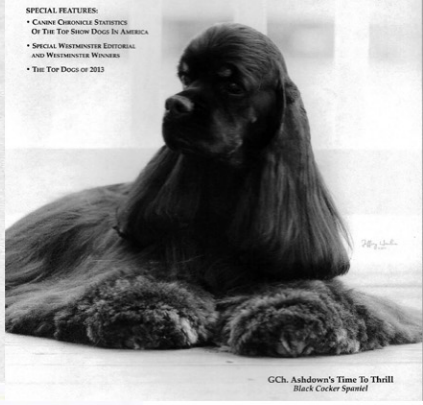

GCh. Ashdown's Time To Thrill
Black Cocker Spaniel

BORN AND BRED IN AMERICA

The Rat Terrier

Authors such as Eric Knight, Jim Kjelgaard, and Albert Payson Terhune have long drawn people to their breeds through their books. What child could read one of their works and not want a Collie or an Irish Setter? Architect and Brooklyn resident Frank Rogers was drawn to the Rat Terrier through the works of William Faulkner—particularly his 1942 story "The Bear." Rogers is much more than a Faulkner buff—he agrees with a critic who called Faulkner "probably the finest artist in any medium that America has produced."

One of the characters in "The Bear" is a dog that Faulkner calls a "fyce"—a small ratter, weighing "less than six pounds" who charges toward a gigantic old bear when the hounds turn and flee. That type of dog was more commonly called a "feist" and was developed primarily in the southern U.S. as a ratter and all-around farm dog. They are small, parti-color dogs, not to be confused with Toy Fox Terriers. What was called a feist is now is AKC-recognized as the Rat Terrier. Rogers's dog, Buster, is now 12 years-old, and isn't a show dog. However, Rogers has come to see the Rat Terriers compete, and to celebrate his favorite author and favorite breed.

Harriett Browne of Columbus, Ohio is at the show with "Q"—she's a competitor in agility, rally, and obedience, where the initial stands for a qualifying score. GCh. Ragan-rat's Quintessential Q RN, CM, OA, OAJ, NF is undeniably successful in both conformation and performance events. Browne had been looking for a small breed with which to compete. "I kept going through the AKC roster of breeds, but didn't find the right match for me," she says. "Then, a friend who has Dobes brought a Rat Terrier to an agility trial." Her friend put a MACH (Master Agility Champion) title on her little dog in 18 months, and Browne knew that she'd found her new breed.

"Dobes will always be my first love, but these dogs are phenomenal," she explains. "They're healthy, smart, biddable, and wash and wear—I just put Q in the shower with me!"

Q lives with Dobermans and cats, and is great with Browne's grandchildren. "I once found him curled up in a crate with a cat," Browne says. "He's great with everything except rodents!"

Q's breeder and co-owner, Darice Ragan of Greenback, Tennessee helped to write the UKC standard which was then accepted by the AKC. She literally grew up with the breed—her great-great-grandmother kept them to control rabbits and rats on her property. "They are a do-it-all dog," Ragan says. "From agility to hunting in a barn and jumping hay bales—they can do everything."

Ragan is here to support Browne, but is also showing Ratituee Grand Slam I Am, a 5 year-old male who went Winners Dog. "Dinger's" breeder and owner, Andrea Werner recently passed away, and Dinger now lives with Ragan, where he plays in her creek and runs in her pasture when not showing. These may be small dogs, but exercise is essential, and because Rat Terriers must have "spring in their step" to do their jobs, breed type and conformation are equally important. Rat Terriers aren't built like many of the other terrier breeds, Ragan explains. Whereas some terrier breeds are fairly straight front and back, Rat Terriers need balanced angulation. "The upper arm should equal the shoulder blade in length, and the dog should stand over itself, with good turn of stifle and rear angulation," she says.

They are a fairly healthy breed, according to Ragan. The primary health issues are luxating patellas and an eye condition, primary lens luxation (PLL). Thanks to a DNA test developed by UC-Davis, breeders can now avoid breeding carriers to carriers and producing affected offspring.

Ragan takes her role as a breeder seriously—"it is our job to be stewards of our breed," and she is very selective about where she places her puppies. Ragan is not overly concerned about the impact of AKC registration on the Rat Terrier, saying that any time a breed gains AKC recognition, there will be positives and negatives. "I try to think about the positives," she concludes.

Ragan recently added a tortoise to her menagerie at home. "It's symbolic for me," she says. "Don't be in a hurry, do your homework, and be methodical." These are words to live by for the Chinook, the Rat Terrier—indeed for anyone who breeds and shows dogs.