

The History of the Boxer Dog

A History of the Boxer

Most historians of canines trace the origins of the Boxer back to the mid-19th century, when the type was developed by German Breeders through the crossing a German breed called the Bullenbeisser with the English Bulldog.

Today, the Boxer comes in numerous varieties of two distinct phenotypes, fawn and brindle. Additionally, coat patterns can be anywhere from extremely 'flashy' (to the point of looking white) to "reversed brindle" (which gives the appearance of being black).

A look at the history of the Boxer helped us to better understand not only the physical aspects of our dogs, but also many of his behavioral patterns.

As we mentioned above Boxer dog history includes a mix of the now extinct Bullenbeisser and the English Bulldog.

The history and the noble characteristics of both breeds are combined in the present day Boxer so we begin our history with an in depth look at both parent breeds and even delve a bit into their predecessors.

The English Bulldog is, of course, alive and well, so we'll leave the reader to do their own research on that breed. The Boxer dog history here focuses more on the predecessors that are either now extinct or not as well known.

The Bullenbeisser (Bull Biter)

Due to extensive cross-breeding (which spawned breeds such as today's Boxer) there are no longer any "pure Bullenbeissers"(right).

Historians believe the 'Bullenbesser' name was used interchangeably with 'Barenbeisser'(Bear Biter) in the 18th and 19th century in Central Europe.

The closest living example of the breed can be found in the Spanish Alano though this breed is probably considerably smaller than the Bullenbeisser.

The Bullenbeisser was a hunting dog of a very "hands on" type- that is: it wasn't a retriever of kills, but rather was charged with catching and holding down the hunted animals (usually Bears or Wild Boar) until their masters arrived to finish the kill. Such hunts must have been something to behold!

In my opinion this trait in Boxer dog history plays out today in the way Boxers love to jump up when they meet a friend, traits that would have been useful in bringing down a reared up bear.

Also you can see some of their past in the unique way they literally "box" their toys into the ground. They pound everything: balls, toys, shoes, you name it, with both front paws in a way I haven't seen other breeds do. I think this can all be traced back to the hunt.

In fact, one of my Boxers likes to hold down stray cats that venture into our garden! She never bites, just pins them down till we tell her to let the tabby go.

The Bullenbeissers, in turn count as ancestors, the fighting dogs known as the Alaunts, which were brought as war dogs to Europe from Asia minor by the Alan invaders beginning in circa 370 AD.

The Alaunts

The Alaunt's masters, the Alani, were an Indo-Iranian people who are noted in history as exceptional animal husbandrymen, especially of horses and dogs. As a nomadic people they bred their dogs for working, either as shepherds or as guard dogs.

In about 370 AD the Alans were forced into a diaspora by the conquering Huns and were sundered into three groups. The group of interest to our study is the one who joined with the Vandals in their invasion of Gaul (France).

During the migration into Gaul the Alans turned their attention to breeding dogs of war- and these dogs took part in many famous battles between 370 and the 6th Century AD, during which period the Alans were subsumed by the Franks and the Visigoths.

For example, descendants of today's Boxers took part in the Battle of Chalons, where Attila the Hun was finally repelled from Europe.

In the interest of knowing our dogs better, it is useful to note the pastoral/ warrior mix in the Alaunt- such ancestry helps explain not only today's Boxer's strong athletic build and powerful jaws, but also why they are universally recognized as one of the gentlest dogs with children and other creatures smaller than themselves.

They have an instinct to care for the harmless, but have no fear in the face of a strong opponent.

Of the Alaunts own ancestry, the Alabai still exists today. These are a Central Asian Shepherd Dog, and most of today's Alabai live in Russia. This ancestry pre-dates the Alani's migration into Asia Minor.

However, the Alaunt's masters bred the Alabai with the hounds of South Asia and Persia- these hounds are direct descendants of today's Whippets and Greyhounds, which helps explain the speed and grace found in some (not all!) Boxers. These genes may also partially explain why today's Boxer Dog is short haired.

The Italian Greyhound (left) may be indicative of the dogs that formed this part of the present day Boxer Dog lineage.

The Alani (and the groups with which they later amalgamated) migrated to, or conquered lands throughout Europe, and in each corner of Europe their dogs, the Alaunts evolved differently, in accordance with their environments and the work that they were used for.

The Alabi and Hound mixes that evolved in present day Germany and Central Europe became known as the Bullenbeisser.

The specific strain identified as the 'Brabanter' Bullenbeisser was the branch selected by German breeders Roberth, Konig and Hopner in the late 1870s to cross with the English Bulldog to create the German Boxer.

The Brabanter was primarily a hunting dog (boars) of the nobles. Periodic literature caricatures them as a "powerful, strong and agile" dog.

In spite of the working dog nature of the Brabanter Bullenbeisser, they were also described as household pets when they were not working, proving to be "trustworthy, loving and protective to the women and children".

Since the Brabanter was the smaller of the bull baiter types of the era, scholars believe that it was probably used as a house dog as well as a worker- a part of Boxer dog history that is reflected in the gentle, if playful, nature of the breed today.

Early Boxers

In the early 20th century the breed that was to become the Boxer Dog was about 50% Bullenbeisser and 50% English Bulldog.

However, German breeders continued to introduce more Bullenbeisser blood into the breed. Today the mix is estimated at about 70% Bullenbeisser 30% English Bulldog. This is an important time in Boxer dog history as it not only altered the breed's colors, but also added an element of grace to the dog's make-up as the breed began to look more "Brabanter" and less "Bull Dog".

Early Boxer Dogs were also predominantly white dogs.

It wasn't long after the first German Boxer show in 1902 that the type was standardized as a breed.

The reason for the introduction of more Bullenbeisser blood into the breed was to dilute the white color genes of the Bulldog, most probably, for military purposes before WW I and during the inter-war years. White Boxers were too visible at night.

Boxer dogs were distinguished guard, attack and medic dogs during both great wars.

Phillip Stockman, husband of Fr. Friedrun Stockman, (one of the more important early breeders of the German Boxer and an important part of Boxer Dog History) set up the German Army's Boxer training program for WWI.

Anyone who has seen a brindle or reverse brindle Boxer dog at night will attest to the breeders' success in selectively breeding a natural camouflage into the German Boxer.

They are practically invisible at night, even under a bright moon. Yet another (and hopefully the last) example of a battle trait bred into this otherwise fun-loving and affectionate dog.

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