

# Pekingese Size

By Tony Rosato

The question of Pekingese size is something that has come up for discussion lately among breeders and judges. Traditionally, smallness has always been embraced in our breed while oversized dogs, meaning those even getting close to the breed's only disqualification of 14 pounds, have generally been avoided or looked down upon by purists and most breed specialists. Even a hundred years ago breed founders branched off from the parent club in England in a dispute over the ideal weight limit because they wanted to preserve the original small "palace type" Pekingese imported from China which was usually five to six pounds. They didn't want to see Pekes go over ten pounds.

Today the question persists: What is considered ideal? To answer that, we have to look first at the breed standard, then historical precedent, followed by custom, which of course has varied depending on what region of the country, period in breed history or which country you're talking about.

For decades the American breed standard stated "medium size preferred" and most breeders and exhibitors maintained the breed within that parameter, though there was always a perception that the East preferred the smaller ones while the West wanted them big, though neither perception is true today.

For a long time there was a major difference in how England and America viewed the ideal size, with England preferring an overall smaller type dog than what was often considered ideal in North America except in the Northeast. Even today there are some who believe that a Peke has to be on the big side to do well as a special. But that perception existed 30 years ago too, and some of the British were fond of saying that Americans wanted "hairy monsters that can race around the ring."

It's easy to understand why some would say that. The British breed standard is explicit in its requirement that a Pekingese must first be small. In fact, "small" is actually the first word of their breed standard. That's how important the writers of that standard considered this requirement to be.

The first dictate in the UK standard under General Appearance reads: "**Small**, well balanced, thickset with great dignity and quality." That is the only reference to size; while the standard goes on to say that the ideal weight *should not exceed* eleven pounds for dogs and twelve pounds for bitches. That gives us a pretty good idea that, for the British anyway, the ideal Pekingese dog should be small and weigh no more than 10-11 pounds, which is just about what the original breed founders in England envisioned. Many top breeders in North America and the UK throughout the past century have very much upheld this same ideal.

By contrast, the current American breed standard makes no specific reference to size except to say that the dog is “surprisingly heavy for its size.” That’s it. Under the heading of Size and Substance in the standard it says, “All weights are correct within the limit of fourteen pounds.” So that is a significant difference between the US and UK perception because the British standard very specifically calls for a small dog, while the American standard leaves it wide open, placing emphasis on the ratio of weight to size and allowing a five pound dog to be as correct or ideal as a fourteen pound one.

The great disparity in what is considered ideal or correct weight in the American standard may allow for more diversity of type and more freedom for judges in choosing which dog to put up.

But then there is the factor of historical precedent to consider. The breed has a history of winning dogs of small, medium and large sizes. The dogs brought over from China were in fact sleeve size, with the wealthier exhibitors and breed connoisseurs both in England and America tending to prefer them small.

But then the breed exploded into popularity in England in the early 1900s, and allowance was made for larger dogs in competition up to 18 pounds like the Pug. That of course had the benefit of accommodating the breeding results of more breeders-exhibitors, but it outraged the purists and founders of the original Pekingese Club in England (founded 1904) who wanted to keep the breed as small as it was in China. So they left the 18 pound limit behind and formed a new breed club, Pekin Palace Dog Association (which still flourishes today) establishing a 10-pound limit to preserve what they called the true palace type.

The Americans originally adopted an 18 pound weight limit too when The Pekingese Club of America was founded in 1909. The weight limit was later reduced to 14 pounds where it remains today with a disqualification for any dog over the 14 pound limit.

Most breed specialists don’t want the dogs anywhere near the top of the limit because then you tend to get coarseness -- and a Pekingese must never be coarse.

That is why the pre-1995 American standard stated “medium sized preferred,” and even after the breed standard was revised over ten years ago, many breeders upheld the tradition of medium to small size.

Of course there have been some big winning dogs pushing the top of the limit that were excellent representatives of the breed. But they are the exception. And the general consensus among top breeders and specialist judges is that the ideal has been, and should always be, small to medium size.

We have to remember that there have been some great breeders and exhibitors in England and America throughout history, such as Ed Jenner (Knolland), Antonia Horn (Belknap), the Ashton-Cross ladies (Alderbourne),

Jack Royce (Dah-Lyn), Dorothy Quigley (Orchard Hill), Lilian Snook (Laparata), Jean Eisenman (Jamestown), Kay Jeffords (Chinatown) among others who have taught us through their example that small, compact glamorous Pekingese with noble demeanor are the ideal we should strive for. That size and quality reaches back to our breed's roots where the breed founders promoted smallness and the Chinese bred them in the Forbidden City favoring the same thing along with qualities of independence and bravery.

More than size of course, the main consideration first and foremost is always breed type, balance and proportion, a beautiful head and a free, easy roll. Those considerations always take precedence because from a breeding standpoint size is variable between generations, and it's all the other desirable traits you're after that you want to breed true. That's why a good breeder and astute judge selects for type and soundness first and then size. If you can get everything you want into a small package, then you have your ideal Pekingese.