“I Want an Aussie with a Tail…”

*By Nannette Newbury*

Occasionally I receive requests to leave a tail on a puppy. If you ask you are operating under several misconceptions about the breed. I offer the following response to such request in an effort to educate you about our Natural Bob Tail breed and preserving the breed for future generations.

Hi Clelia and thank you for your interest in Stonepine Australian Shepherds. I hope I can clarify several points for you.

1. Australian Shepherds are a natural bob tail breed/we dock for uniformity. The reason? Because dogs born with the Natural Bob Tail gene can have tails of all varying lengths. The Aussie is not just born with a tail or without a tail. It is a little more complex than that. When I first started with the breed we bred specifically for the NBT gene. And now many of us are again breeding for that gene which is a fundamental part of the breed’s type (look). What this means is that many Aussies are born without tails due to the NBT gene. The natural bob tail is a unique and identifying characteristic of the breed. Many people I speak to think that all Aussies are born with a tail and we have to dock all pups in a litter. This is not true.
2. I am what is called a preservation breeder. I do not breed to sell puppies; I breed to preserve and protect the breed for future generations to enjoy, hopefully as much as I love the breed. In order to do this, we have a strict breed standard that describes what the breed is to look like, how it is to move, temperament, coloring etc. I breed to the breed standard again in order to preserve and protect the breed for future generations. Much like keeping some wild animal or insect from going extinct. We do not wish our breed to become extinct.
3. As a member of our national breed club, as an AKC judge and as the former national club Judge’s Education Coordinator, I have signed a Code of Ethics that includes the preservation of the breed and breeding to the breed standard. As such I cannot ethically sell you a registered purebred Australian Shepherd with a tail. I would be in direct violation of that Code of Ethics.
4. It is highly unlikely you will find any reputable breeder or breeder of high-quality, healthy Aussies with good temperaments that will keep a tail on any of their pups that happen to be born with tails…keep in mind, many are not born with tails.
5. So by asking to fundamentally alter the breed you will likely only find a tailed Aussie from a breeder of lesser quality, integrity and ethics.
6. If you are looking for a dog with a tail there are many breeds that resemble the Australian Shepherd that are not Natural Bob Tail breeds; this would include the Border Collie and literally hundreds of other breeds.

The most difficult part of your request is related to the actual mechanics of how one could meet your request. Let’s say I have a litter born. Again, let me stress I am not breeding to sell puppies. I am breeding a specific litter for a specific reason with the end result being a sound, healthy Aussie that carries on the traits we all love.

I do not make my selection in the litter until 8 to 10 weeks of age. Tails, if needed, are docked within 24 hours of whelping (the same as pig tails; sheep tails, etc.) prior to the nerve endings growing into the tail. How would I know what puppy to leave the tail on at 24 hours of age? I wouldn’t. So, the mechanics of your request are not as simple as you might think.

I hope this helps you to understand our breed more thoroughly and I sincerely thank you for your request. I also hope that you honor and respect my breed.