

THE HAIRLESS BREEDS

Amy Fernandez

It's hard to look beyond one inescapable fact about hairless dogs. Consequently, many observers fail to appreciate their most amazing trait. For thousands of years they have defied dismissive pronouncements about their genetic fitness, surviving and thriving in situations that have spelled the demise of lesser breeds.

The early twentieth-century author and judge Freeman Lloyd is considered a world class authority on hounds and sporting breeds. Over the years, he also owned quite a few hairless dogs, including the resourceful Pongo. *"At an old time Bohemian resort in NYC I once purchased a beautifully marked Mexican Hairless Dog from a Mexican who had recently arrived from over the Rio Grande. The dog was not only a performer, but a wonderful walker on his hind legs. ...Because of his frequent voluntary performances in taverns and restaurants around the village, Pongo became more or less an institution. All of the villagers knew the dog's name- knew it so well, in fact, that they began to address me as Pongo. That was too much. Even children hailed me by the embarrassing nickname. ...It was before the days of the automobile, and I used to drive to town in a buggy. One day, Pongo jumped out of the buggy to chase a cat in the Syrian quarter at the southern end of lower Washington Street. I just drove off and left him to shift for himself"* (National Geographic)

For most dogs, jumping from a moving vehicle into Manhattan traffic would be a death sentence. But not for Pongo. A few weeks later, Lloyd

was stopped by a cabdriver on Fifth Avenue with news that his errant dog had found a new home. Pongo lived the rest of his life with the famous actress Mary Garden at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, wearing a \$12 thousand dollar diamond collar. This story may seem far fetched, but accounts of Mary Garden's hairless pet have appeared in numerous books and periodicals.

There is one lingering question about this story. Was Pongo a Crested or a Xolo? His photo has been reproduced countless times, variously identified as both breeds. Even Lloyd admitted *"there is a great similarity between Mexican and Chinese hairless dogs. As a onetime owner of both sorts, I can testify that there was little difference in the general setup of the two kinds. The alleged China-bred dog which I purchased from a sailor in Cardiff, Wales, carried a bigger crest of hair than did the harsher-haired dog I bought in New York."* (National Geographic)

Writing in 1944, this was an honest assessment of the situation. Small, hairless dogs had been documented in kennel club records since the late nineteenth century. They were known by a variety of exotic names hinting at Oriental, African, or Mexican ancestry. Unfortunately, no traceable records of their origin existed. Experts constantly debated whether they merited classification as separate breeds or were simply crossbreeds that didn't belong in any dog show or studbook. **After judging several classes of hairless dogs at an 1893 show in London Vero Shaw stated that they all belonged to one breed, and it was impossible to separate them.**

Turn of the century studbook entries reveal that breed designation was based on appearance rather than ancestry. For instance, one of the most famous Chinese Cresteds of the period, Hairy King, is cited in countless books as a prime example of the breed. Oddly, Hairy King's son, Paderweski Jr. owned by the noted British rare breed expert H C Brooke, was registered and exhibited as a Mexican Hairless. In 1949 Stackpole's New Dog Encyclopedia states *"the Mexican Hairless is sometimes confused with the Chinese Crested because the breeds are so similar in appearance ... The Crested is the larger of the two breeds, sometimes weighing 25 pounds."*

A tremendous size range was just one of the discrepancies undermining breed type by that time. The journalist, breeder, and judge Ida Garret implemented one of the first efforts to create conformity of type in the Chinese Crested. Garrett, is primarily remembered for her contribution to Chihuahua development but she also bred and owned numerous Cresteds and Xolos.

In 1935 her account of hairless dog history appeared in the AKC Gazette *"The little Mexican Hairless dog must not be confused with the much smaller, furry coated Chihuahua dog. There is no relation between the two breeds at all, except that breeders in Mexico have occasionally crossed the two. The hairless is a dog weighing on average from six to 15 pounds, and some run as high as 20 pounds or so, while there are a few which weigh as little as two to four pounds."*