



Tail Docking, and Why We Do It

AMANDA LELAND · RENEGADE MINI AUSSIES ·

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017 · UPDATED FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2020

******GRAPHIC WARNING! Photos shown on the last page may be disturbing!******

Tail docking is obviously a highly controversial topic amongst Aussie lovers worldwide. However, as with all things, knowing the history behind the WHY will almost always clear up any confusion. So, let's start with the basics.

Aussies are a herding breed. This means that they were bred with the intention and drive to work with livestock. Cattle, horses, sheep, etc. Powerful animals that can easily intimidate a human, let alone a 40lb dog. As the dogs worked the fields, their tails were much more susceptible to being grabbed or trampled by the livestock, broken or tangled as they wagged against limbs and brush, and even gave more possibilities to be bitten by rabies infected animals. Not to mention those used in baiting and fighting were vulnerable with long tails. When compared to those dogs born without tails, the solution was apparent. This began the process of docking- to protect the dog from all instances mentioned above.

Then, in the 1600/1700s, a tax was instated for all pet only dogs, but was levied for those used to work- the distinction made by those with or without tails. Tailed dogs were taxed, tailless dogs were not, so docking became more popular. In 1796, the tax was lifted but most standards were set and the trend continued.

Not all working breeds are created the same. We hear all the time "but border collies work in the fields and aren't docked, so why dock an Aussie?" They aren't the same dog- that's why. Border collies are usually used for herding sheep- smaller livestock- and they work by staying low to the ground with their tails tucked safely between their back legs, and utilizing a stare to drive them from a distance. Aussies don't crouch and their larger size is commonly used for larger livestock, such as cattle, that they work up close. In addition, they don't carry their tails between their legs. Most Aussies have a "gay tail" like a golden retriever that is carries up and over the back, completely exposed. For an angry bull or bronco, that's a beautiful target.. You cannot compare apples to oranges simply because they are both fruit,

just as you cannot compare two totally different breeds simply because they are in the same category.



Border Collie working at a distance with "the stare" and tail tucked safely between the legs.

Photo courtesy of:

<https://www.oldtimefarmshpherd.org/>



Australian Shepherd with a "gay tail" carried high over the back like a flag.

Photo found at:

<https://www.quora.com/>

Today, the vast majority of Mini and Toy Aussies are used exclusively as pets and don't face the danger of working injuries. So why do we still dock? Docking is done at 2-5 days old, before the bones are hardened and connected, and before the nerves are fully developed. At 3

days old, how is a breeder to know which puppies will go to a pet home or a working home? They can't. How are they to know which puppies have that drive and take off any time they see livestock like their instincts tell them to, or which won't? They can't. If we forget the aesthetics of the "breed standard" for just a moment (which was created stating docked tails because that is what was done to protect the dogs) you have to realize that good breeders dock the tails of their babies because it is worth one small pinch to all the puppies to save the few that will work a lifetime of pain from injury, or even their untimely death.

Think I'm being overly-dramatic? This story below literally came across my newsfeed TODAY (8/23/2017) about a BORDER COLLIE (safely tucked tail, right?) and her owner that found out the hard way why Aussies don't have tails.

PLEASE BE WARNED! THIS STORY IS DEVASTATING AND THE PHOTOS ARE EVEN WORSE, BUT I FEEL THEY ARE NEEDED TO SHOW EXACTLY WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO- SO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE GENUINELY DOING IT TO PROTECT THEM, NEVER to hurt them or for "purely cosmetic reasons." Photos are found in the first two comments of this article, which you will have to dig to see. I don't want anyone to "accidentally" see this trauma. And no, sweet Lego did not survive.

"So we often discuss WHY Aussies are docked, but often people make the argument that not all dogs will be ranch or working dogs. Have any of you ever SEEN the damage that can be done to a dogs tail? Well boys and girls, today I have had my logic of NEVER allowing a tailed dog in my barn solidly reaffirmed.

A good friend of mine, who has owned and bred border collies, both working and show lines for years, lost one of her beautiful girls this morning. How you may wonder? This dog, who had grown up working stock was tagging along at the owner's heels through the shedrow and a stud horse she is training lunged through the cross chains on his stall door and grabbed Lego by her tail. This is a BORDER COLLIE people. Dogs bred and acclaimed for their low "safe" tail carriage. This 1300lb, lightening fast stud, grabbed her and flipped her so hard that her tail completely degloved. He threw her so high and so hard that her spine broke, and fractured in multiple places. There was no saving Lego.

Yes, Lego was a ranch dog. But many of her siblings are just pets. But at 3 days of age, her breeder had no inkling which if any of those beautiful babies would have what it takes to be a working dog. Had they been Aussies, they should have been docked. Had she been an Aussie, she would have been docked as the owner always does her best to breed to the standard. My friend is in agony over her girl. And she is now considering never letting her dogs work stock after seeing what can happen. She has always joked with me about my docked Aussies. As I left the barn she made the remark, "Well looks like I can't give you anymore shit about your flat bottomed buggers!" To which I could only reply "Hunny, I'm so sorry."

Aussies are notorious for their "gay" tails, ie high tail carriage, especially when working. Think how much easier it would have been for something to happen had Legos tail been a 2 foot waving flag fluttering above her..." B. Burress

*

*

*

*

*

*

*****PHOTOS SHOWN ON FOLLOWING PAGE! GRAPHIC WARNING!*****

*

*

*

*

*

*

*



As you have hopefully learned, there is a wide range of “breeders” out there, especially with the popularity of our breed, but they are not created equally. Good and reputable breeders know our breed’s history and the WHY’s behind why things are done a certain way.

I know many, many breeders who will leave tails by owner request if the puppy is paid for in full by dock day. This ensures the puppy has a specific home where it will be strictly a pet and not face the dangers of a working home with a tail.

So please, PLEASE, understand that when you come across a breeder who is adamant about the breed standard and tail docking, it’s not because they are cruel or careless.

In fact, it’s exactly the opposite.

