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It's not very often that you come across a completely new breed in the world of dogs.

The Biewer's coat colouring is described as white-blue-gold

How the Biewer breed was born

Getting **the show** on **the road**

The Biewer Terrier was born in 1984 but is only starting to become a popular toy dog now with his fun-loving character and adorable looks. We take a look at how this breed was developed, all the trials and tribulations it endured and the road ahead.



A sweet-natured dog, the Biewer makes a great companion

We spoke to Gayle Pruett, the president of the original Biewer Terrier Club in America (BTCA) on all the aspects of how the Biewer was born.

Werner Biewer and his wife, Gertrud, first started this adorable breed in January of 1984 in Germany. The couple, who had been showing Yorkshire Terriers for 20 years, decided to show Schneeflocken von Friedheck, son of Darling and Fru Fru von Friedheck, who were both Dortmund Champions. Schneeflocken did not have the normal colours of a Yorkshire Terrier though. He was blue, white and gold and was unfortunately marked as the ‘wrong colour, not for breeding’ by the VDH (Verband für das Deutsche Hundewesen – The German Kennel Club).

Unimpressed, Werner Biewer decided to take an entirely new route. “Mr Biewer was not happy with this decision and began his search for a registry that would accept his black and white Yorkies as a separate breed. The ACH (Allgemeiner Club der Hundefreunde Deutschland e.V) was the first club to accept them as a breed of their own and registered them as a Biewer Yorkshire Terrier a la Pom Pon,” says Gayle.

“Mr and Mrs Biewer were very secretive and had a very tight grip on their breeding programme. They spent five years selectively breeding their dogs until they were able to establish and breed true, to a standard uniquely, the Biewer breed. In 1989 when Mr Biewer signed the standard for this new breed, it was that of the Yorkshire Terrier with the colouring being White-Blue-Gold,” says Gayle.

At this point most of the Biewer puppies had been sold to pet homes and only a handful of breeders were offered Stud services. The Biewer was also extremely expensive 25 years ago and would have cost someone about 4 000 Deutsch Mark (about R26 000). Gayle says that at the time they suspected some German breeders of taking shortcuts to recreate their own Biewers.

Then another blow hit when Werner Biewer died in 1997. This was when the Biewer breed hit an all time low. Due to hefty prices and Mrs Biewer stopping her own breeding programme, the interest around the breed dropped. The years went by and the Biewer breed was slowly dying out.

Amazingly in 2004 things started to change. “Due to the American interest and money, the Biewer suddenly came into high demand. At this stage many of the old Biewer lines had been closed and the dogs had been retired. The high demand and the willingness of the American buyer to pay top dollar for the dogs, shifted German Biewer breeding into high gear.

Due to American interest and money, the Biewer suddenly came into high demand.

“In November of 2007, Mrs Biewer agreed to a meeting with representatives of the Biewer Terrier Club of America, Inc. She shared important information about the early development of the breed, and the trials and errors they had gone through to reach their goal. The BTCA shared what they had been doing since the arrival of the Biewers in America and the trials and tribulations they were also going through.

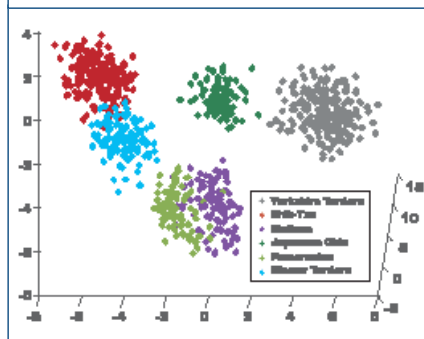
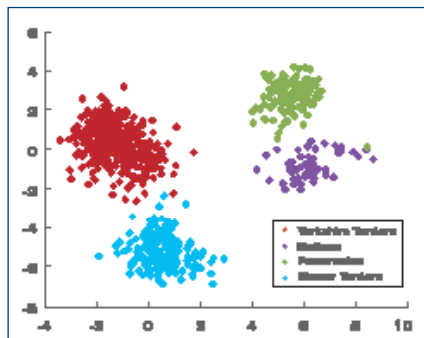
“Mrs Biewer is in full support of what the BTCA is doing for the breed and has also become a club member in order to help with the development of the breed in America. We are in constant contact with her, keeping her abreast of the advancements of the breed and have developed a close friendship through it all,” says Gayle.

Genetic testing

Gayle says that when they first received the Biewer, they were intrigued as to what other breeds he could have in his genetic line because he looked so different from the Yorkshire Terrier. They therefore went to Mars Veterinary, an advanced pet genetic service, and the results revealed what she had thought.

In February of 2007, the BTCA contacted Mars Veterinary and started testing, but it wasn't until later on that year that the results were released. “We have tested over 100 dogs to date and the tests show that the Biewer is a distinct breed of its own. There has never been a breed signature developed for the Biewer breed, so when the tests came back, it showed other breeds.

“When put on a graph, the Biewers grouped together in their own group away from the Yorkie and any other breed. If they were just a mix breed, they would have been all over the chart and not grouped together. We tested a Yorkie as a Biewer and that Yorkie ended up in the Yorkie cluster away from the Biewer group,” says Gayle.



These two charts show that the Biewer breed stands on its own

The road ahead

Due to the genetic testing done, it is clear that the Biewer breed is in fact a breed of its own. But there have been some bumps along the road to get the breed recognised.

Gayle says, “We have applied to the American Rare Breed Association (ARBA), United Kennel Club (UKC) and the American Kennel Club (AKC) for recognition. ARBA has accepted the Biewer Terrier as a distinct breed of its own and the BTCA as the parent club. We are still waiting to hear from UKC after turning in our last report from Mars Veterinary, and also AKC. We believe it won't be long before the AKC accepts us.”

The Biewer Terrier is a delightful breed and the BTCA already has 60 members and South Africa is quickly catching on. All in all, the Biewer is growing at a rapid pace and will hopefully one day be recognised by the Kennel Union of South Africa. □



The American Rare Breed Association (ARBA) accepted the Biewer Terrier as a rare breed in 2007



In South Africa all Biewer pups are tested and their pedigrees verified by comparing their DNA profiles to those of their parents



A Biewer and a Yorkshire Terrier puppy – they are two different breeds genetically

Genetic testing in South Africa

The Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at the Onderstepoort Faculty of Veterinary Science (OPVGL) is responsible for the DNA profiling of the Biewer Terrier in South Africa. The laboratory is a member of the International Society of Animal Genetics (ISAG) and participates in an international comparison test every two years. In the test various laboratories that do dog DNA testing, compare and standardise their tests and results, ensuring that the highest international standards and most current technology is applied at the laboratory.

During the last comparison test in 2008, a total of 40 international labs took part and agreed on a minimum set of DNA markers for dog genotyping. These markers are used to create a unique profile of each dog that provides a means of individual identification and a validation of the pedigree of the dog when comparing this profile to the profiles of its parents.

In the case of the Biewer, the individual unique DNA profile is obtained from a blood sample or buccal swab sample of the animal. This profile or 'DNA fingerprint' is stored in a database at the OPVGL. All Biewer pups are tested and

their pedigrees verified by comparing their DNA profiles to those of their parents that are already on the database. This ensures that registered Biewers are only from Biewer to Biewer matings, thus maintaining the integrity of the local Biewer studbook.

DNA certificates from labs belonging to ISAG, containing the profiling information of each dog, can also be exchanged between these labs internationally ensuring that the individual identity of exported dogs can be verified in the importing country. DNA samples of each dog are stored at the OPVGL and can be used in future for breed specific genetic testing, as these tests become available.

It can also be used by the OPVGL in the local development of breed specific genetic tests if any underlying genetic problems become apparent in the breed in future. A complete DNA sample set of a breed or pedigree is an extremely valuable resource for future use as technology improves and genome information of the dog increases. The Biewer, as a new breed in SA, is setting an example to other dog breeds by making use of this resource from the start.

Dr Cindy Harper, Veterinary Genetics Laboratory, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria.

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