



Mutt, mongrel, crossbreed, mixed-breed, cur, tyke or Heinz 57 – call them what you want but there’s no doubting there’s a wide and diverse range of the world’s most popular type of dog – the Bitsa.

Often at dog training or at the dog park, I like to play the game of ‘guess the breeds’ when looking at an obvious crossed dog. It’s always interesting to talk to the dogs’ owners to get their feedback on what they know about their dog’s heritage. Much of it is guess-work especially if the dog was adopted from a shelter.

Backyard breeders often pass-off a dog as being ‘pure-bred’ which can be a pretty loose term to support an accidental or indiscriminate mating. There’s also the mercenary breeding and underbelly of the pet industry that churn out fashionable cross-breeds or ‘designer dogs’ for a market ripe with ignorance and driven by trends.

Up until just recently, it’s all been guess work by looking at the physical characteristics of the dog and observing behaviour and trying to match the aesthetics with traits. The growing availability, and declining cost, of high-tech DNA tests now give dog owners, speculating over the makeup of their mutts, something to do besides shrug and wonder.

BITSA, which stands for Breed Identification Through Scientific Analysis) from Genetic Technologies is one of Australia’s first DNA based, breed identification test. The test can detect the breed of mix within your dog. The test can identify breed signatures as far back as three generations and can define, provided that they are present, the primary (parent), secondary (grandparent) and distant (great-grandparent) breeds in a dog’s ancestry.

This non-invasive test simply involves rubbing a supplied cotton swab on the inside of your dog’s cheek to take the sample. The kit can be sent to you and you can do the swab at home without the need to visit a vet. The kit is then sent off and within five days the results are posted out to you.



So feeling a little CSI and channeling Maurie Povich we decided to take three obvious crossbreeds and put the testing to the test to give their curious owners a window into their dog’s heritage.

Case 1 – Josie



Owned by Kate Paget-Campbell and Jacob Campbell

Age: 18 months old

Where did you get her from? Through Monika’s Doggie Rescue

What breed or mix do you believe is in Josie’s make-up?

We were told that Josie was a Border Collie crossed with a Terrier. We saw pictures of her mum and she looked like a Fox Terrier cross. Often when we look at Josie, she appears to have some cattle dog in her. Lot’s of people believe or assume she has cattle dog in her which could be due to the flecking in her coat.

What traits of the breed/s mentioned do you believe your dog exhibits?

Josie is full of energy and highly trainable which is very much a cattle dog or Border trait. The downside is that both breeds can be destructive if you’re not working both the body and mind. Just like Border Collies, Josie thrives on praise and is quite sensitive. Another pointer to the cattle dog is that they’re loyal, protective, alert and suspicious of people and dogs they don’t know. Josie exhibits all these to varying degrees. Fox Terriers also require energetic play and can become destructive without proper exercise and leadership.

Results

- Australian Cattle Dog (Secondary) meaning that Josie’s grandma or granddad was a Cattle Dog
- Doberman (Distant) meaning that her great grandma or granddad was a Doberman

Kate and Jacob's reaction:

“You’re kidding! You’re not kidding? The Cattle dog doesn’t surprise us obviously, but at no time would we ever have looked at Josie and said she’s got to have Doberman in there somewhere. For a start she’s not that big and not sleek like a Doberman. This is amazing but in some ways great for us to know. You know five years down the track she could have some strange illness or something we and the vets are scratching our heads about. Knowing that she has Doberman in her means we can look out for illnesses or anything that Doberman’s are predisposed to. Going into this has been a great experience and all through it we knew we absolutely love her, regardless of what is in her make-up.”



Case 2 – Bronte

Owned by Louise Underhill and Vicky Coumbe

Age: nearly 2 years old

Where did you get her from? bought her from a pet store

What breed or mix of breed do believe is in Bronte’s make-up?

We were told by the owner of the store, who was also the breeder, that she’s a ‘mini Spoodle’. So that would make her half Cocker Spaniel and half Poodle but everyone who sees her says she is a Poodle. We both think her face looks a bit more like a Spaniel having now looked closely at that breed. She is definitely not a mini size but is a toy size as she is little and only weighs 5.2kg.

What traits of the breed/s mentioned do you believe your dog exhibits?

Bronte is very smart and learns new things very easily which we believe is very Poodle like. She has a very Poodle like body but her ears are more like a Spaniel. She is very friendly with other dogs and people which is common to both breeds but absolutely loves babies and kids which we’re lead to believe is more Spaniel. She loves to be with us and follows us everywhere around the house which could be considered a Poodle trait or just a very affectionate disposition.

Results

- Poodle (Primary) meaning that Bronte is all Poodle and not even a hint of Cocker Spaniel in her

Vic and Lou's reaction:

“There are a few people who are going to be saying ‘I told you so’. We wouldn’t swap Bronte for the world but we did specifically go to that store to buy a Poodle crossed with a Cocker Spaniel. We paid \$1,000 for a dog that was sold as a Spoodle, we even received a certificate to state that. I think that’s really unethical of the pet store owner especially since she said she bred Bronte herself.

We love her and wouldn’t swap her for the world though–she’s just such a beautiful dog.”

Case 3 – Icee



Owned by Francine & Andee Branwhite

Age: 10

Where did you get her from? RSPCA Yagoona when she was 13 weeks old

What breed or mix do you believe is in Icee’s make-up?

We were told that Icee was a Husky crossed with German Shepherd but we believe she’s more Husky crossed with Kelpie. Her blue eyes, curly tail and thick coat are very Husky-like. Her tan and white marks would suggest Kelpie.

What traits of the breed/s mentioned do you believe your dog exhibits?

Icee rarely barks which we believe is a Husky trait. When she was very young she would occasionally howl. She is very obedient which could be the Kelpie in her as they’re working dogs and like following instruction and leadership. She is excellent with children and likes to bury bones but we’re not sure if that’s attributable to any breed.

Results

- Siberian Husky (Secondary) meaning that Icee’s granddad or grandma was a Siberian Husky. The rest is a bitsa mix.

Francine's reaction:

“No real surprises there. We are not surprised at all that Icee is part Siberian Husky. Her blue eyes, curly tail, lack of barking, and howling when she was young always made us believe she had Husky somewhere in her background.”

The BITSA is available through selected retailers, vets and online stores for \$125. Further information is available through Genetic Technologies at their website

www.gtglabs.com/bitsa or by calling (03) 8412 7000. Results are posted back to the client with the breeds found in you dogs ancestry. It’s important to understand that BITSA can only detect breeds that are present in a dog’s ancestry. Sometimes either one or both parents can be termed ‘outbred’ which refers to dogs with mixed breed parents and grandparents. In this case a distinct breed signature is not present within a dog’s DNA. If your dog is heavily mixed, this may prevent a primary or secondary breed from being determined.





“I am passionately curious” Albert Einstein

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