

# ***Selection: The Key to Successful Breeding***

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Whether we inbreed, linebreed, outcross or use a combination of all three, the secret to breeding success starts with our ability to know which individuals we should keep in our breeding programs and which to place as neutered or spayed pets. Breeders who excel in the selection process possess three important characteristics: (1) they have an "eye for a dog" and can visualize the impact various ancestors will have in a pedigree; (2) they possess a thorough knowledge of their breed's history and breed standard; and (3) they are not kennel blind. Regarding this all important last characteristic, Patricia Craige (1997) tells us: "Assuming you know dogs in general and your breed in particular, inability to look at your dogs objectively will derail all of your hard work if you do not get past it."

To help you develop your selection skills, some tips from Patricia Craige's *Born To Win* (1997) are presented below.

## **"Pick for type. Cull for soundness."**

Although many breeders think of "culling" in terms of euthanizing deformed or sick puppies, it can also refer to spaying or neutering puppies who are not worthy of remaining in the breeding program. This old dog man's adage emphasizes the importance of health in any breeding program.

## **Be consistent in your selection criteria.**

Novice breeders often subconsciously change their selection criteria from litter to litter, thereby lessening their chances for improvement. It's important to have a mental picture of the "ideal" specimen you are trying to breed. To this should be added the important criteria for all breeds which are health, longevity, temperament, soundness and fertility.

## **Understand the concept of "breeding-up" and decide if it applies to you.**

"Breeding-up" often typifies the experience of first time owners who have purchased an inferior quality bitch to which they are too emotionally attached to spay. The plan is to get a better daughter out of each succeeding generation and "breed up." Although not impossible to accomplish, because of the length of time and expertise required, beginning breeders will have a better and quicker chance of success if they start breeding with a higher quality bitch.

## **Have a list of desirable traits to aim for. These should be tracked in order to show evidence of improvement in the breeding program.**

High on any list should be the following:

1. Health, temperament, and reproductive ability
2. Balance and sound movement
3. Good fronts and rears, legs and feet
4. Correct size, proportion and tail set  
Good head, eyes and expression

## **Understand the concept, "drag of the breed."**

Coined by Mrs. James Edward Clark, "drag of the breed" refers to individuals that fall seriously short of their breed type as called for in their standards. In the Basset Hound breed, for example, any individual that is square in outline as opposed to long, low and rectangular, would be considered the drag of the breed. These individuals should be removed from the breeding program.

## **Because the perfect dog will never be bred, it is necessary to decide how much you will compromise in order to bring certain desirable traits into your program. It is far better to make a trade-off on cosmetic things than on traits that effect movement and health.**

Much of the give-and-take on good and bad traits evolves from years of experience and learning how your line develops. A dog's ability to perform the function for which it was intended should remain one of the top priorities. In the Basset Hound breed, for example, it would be difficult to forgive the hound who continually trips and falls because it would not possess the ability to "follow a trail over and through difficult terrain" as called for in the standard. On the other hand, a cosmetic fault like a lighter eye may be more easily forgiven on a sound moving Basset.

## **As you start producing higher quality animals on a more consistent basis, your standards of culling should become higher. At this level, unacceptable traits in closely bred animals should not be forgiven.**

Patricia Craige feels strongly on the point of faulty, tightly bred dogs, and tells us: "One vow that I have kept is to be harsher on very closely bred dogs than on any others. Since my personal belief is the closer the breeding, the more dangerous the product, the puppies from such matings that do not measure up go immediately to pet homes to be neutered. This is one way to protect your breed....A rule of thumb might be that the closer-bred, mediocre animal is much more dangerous to the breed's gene pool than a mediocre animal that is outcrossed."

### **Select only the best individuals for the show ring.**

The closer you get to Master Breeder status the more important it is to keep only the crème de la crème out of each new generation and remove the lesser quality animals from the gene pool. The same concept carries over to the show ring. Average, mediocre individuals who do not measure up to your highest quality should not be shown by you or others. In the words of Mrs. Craige: "A breeding program is better when a few really good dogs represent it in the ring and stay in the gene pool than when it is represented by a wide array of dogs – many of them mediocre – with all of them in the gene pool. Your goal is not how many but how good!"

#### REFERENCE:

Craige, P. 1997. Born to win: breed to succeed. Wilsonville, OR: Doral.