The Making of a Master Breeder

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From Tally Ho, March-April 1998

Master breeders are those unique individuals who make a lasting contribution to the improvement of their breed and the sport of dogs.

Master breeders (Craig 1997):

A. Protect and safeguard a breed's original purpose and function.
B. Blend art and science in their never-ending passion to produce the ideal dog.
C. Breed Top Ten dogs, specialty winners and dogs that garner records as top producers.
D. Allow their great dogs to be used by others in the sport.
E. Rise above times of insecurity and heartbreaking set-backs.
F. Set goals towards which they remain true and painfully objective.
G. Are role models of good sportsmanship.
H. Do their homework knowing that producing greatness is not a matter of random good luck.

Whether your goal is to produce one or two champions or you aspire to become a master breeder who can be instrumental in improving your breed, worthwhile breeding comes from doing a lot of homework! In addition to having a working knowledge of how genes work, successful breeders need to do the following.

Know the Origin and Historical Purpose Of Your Breed

Every breed came into existence for a specific purpose. Historically, the basset was followed on foot and used for the slow trailing of small game such as rabbit and hare. The Basset's long ears were developed to stir up the scent for his keen nose to follow. Short heavily-boned legs provided sound and efficient running gear in dense cover, endowing him with great endurance, agility and sturdiness. Although the Basset is a long, low, massive dog, his substantial structure is lean enough to provide great stamina in the field.
Without a knowledge of the Basset’s historical purpose we are not able to truly understand why the form and function of the Basset were developed. Master breeders commit themselves to safeguarding a breed’s original purpose and function because even though a breed may never be called upon to fulfill its primary purpose, breeders and judges must evaluate a breed based on: (1) how correct its structural build is to carry out its original purpose and (2) how effectively it uses that structure.1

COMMENT: It is especially important to remember that the peculiar long, low structure of the Basset does not give it license to move in any way that is itself peculiar or unsound (Skolnick 1997) If anything, the Basset’s unusual massive structure calls for especially sound movement in order to maintain this scent hound’s capacity for endurance.

Have a Thorough and Complete Knowledge of Your Breed’s Standard

Breed standards are based on the historical purpose of a breed and describe the physical and mental attributes that made a particular breed do what it was expected to do. A breed standard is a verbal description which guides breeders in their quest to produce the ideal specimen of that breed. Each standard represents a concept (rather than an actual dog) against which breeders measure the dogs they produce and judges measure each competitor of that breed.

The Basset Hound Illustrated Standard,2 expands the understanding of our official standard and is invaluable to gaining a deeper insight into the form and function of the Basset Hound. Breeders should know the breed standard and illustrated standard “by heart!”

COMMENT: The Standard does not describe how to achieve the ideal of a particular breed; rather it guides breeders who must combine a sense of artistry with basic genetic principles in their quest to produce the classic dog.

Know What Features Make Your Breed Unique

In order to truly understand a breed it is absolutely necessary to know its unique features. Some unusual features of the Basset are long ears and short legs; the latter are "heavier in bone, size considered, than any other breed of dog" (the official Standard).

Breeders should not be tempted to add window dressing or exaggerate the unique features of their breed in an effort to make a dog look prettier or ‘typier’.2 An example would be breeding Bassets with ears so long or legs so short that they interfere with correct movement.

COMMENT: To gain more perspective on the Basset Hound, read other breed standards. Particularly illuminating for their similarities and differences is a comparison of The Basset Hound Illustrated Standard with the illustrated standard of the Dachshund. (Visualization of the Official Dachshund Standard3).

Know Which Faults in Your Breed are Considered Very Serious, Serious and Minor

In order to properly select and discard animals from a breeding program, breeders need to fully understand the relative seriousness of faults in their breed.

Skolnick’s analysis of the Basset Hound standard lists some "very serious faults” as steep shoulders with short upper arms, out at elbows, weak pastemers, excessive crook in legs and turn out of feet, flat or splayed feet, steep or poorly angulated hindquarters, bowed legs, cowhocks and incorrect bite. Some "serious faults” are wide or flat skull, snipey muzzle, pancake ear, roach or sway back, barrel or short chest, incorrect temperament and absence of loose skin. Several "minor faults” include light, round or protruding eyes, absence of haw, harsh expression, absence of parallel planes and incorrect stop.4
COMMENTS: A review of Skolnick’s partial list shows that many "very serious faults" refer to incorrect running gear and movement which hinder performance and endurance. "Serious faults" are generally those relating to body and proportion, including the head, which is an important element of type. "Minor faults" are generally cosmetic and smaller in detail.

Learn the Parts of a Dog’s Anatomy

The official standard for any breed cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of the dog’s anatomy. As a starting point to understanding the standard and the correct structure for the Basset Hound, every breeder needs to know terms like "sternum," "scapula," "pastern," etc. and where they are located on the dog.

Knowledge of the individual parts of a dog is an important means to an end, since ultimately we must view each dog as the sum total of its parts.

Decide What is Ideal

It is imperative that breeders have a mental picture of the ideal specimen they are attempting to breed.

Mary and Wilton Meyer (Oranpark, Reg.), well-known Basset Hound breeders of the 1960’s, have perhaps said it best: "Allowing for a change in style, we think that the most important thing a breeder must keep in mind is an absolutely steadfast adherence to his own ideal mental picture of the type of animal he is trying to produce: (Frederiksen 1998). Without such a "goal," breeders cannot decide what to keep and what to discard from their breeding programs.6

COMMENT: In many instances your ideal Basset Hound may not be an actual dog but rather a combination of outstanding features from several dogs.

REFERENCES: