

Breeding Dogs - A Paradigm Shift

It is not uncommon to read articles about the mediocre quality of many show dogs today, the lack of mentors, the short duration of time people stay involved with showing and breeding dogs, etc. We are also reminded of the glory days of the large hobby kennels of the past and the great dogs they produced. Why has this change occurred? Certainly time and money are factors, but I believe that there has also been a paradigm shift that has brought us to where we are today.

On the flip side of the coin we also lament about the growth of puppy mills and pet shops. Where does the problem lie? Though these problems will probably always be with us, perhaps part of the problem is closer to home than we may think.

Webster's Dictionary defines breeding as: **breed-ing**, *n.* 2. The improvement or development of breeds of livestock, as by selective mating and hybridization.

A breeder then, by definition, would be someone who carries out this task. Instead it seems that breeders have become phobic about breeding.

Today we might define responsible breeders as those who:

- Breed only outstanding dogs with health clearances
- Spend tremendous amounts of time handling and socializing puppies
- Place puppies in responsible homes and provide support throughout the dog's life

These are all worthy goals for us as breeders, but along with these good things we have also created some other unwritten rules for what defines a "responsible breeder" such as those who:

- Turn away most inquiries as unsuitable (rather than educating people)
- Get a gold star for phrases such as: "I have only had one litter in the past ten years."

Our fear of being viewed as a "puppy mill" has reached such a fevered pitch that we now apologize for breeding litters. We have become like a strict religious sect that doesn't believe in having children, yet who don't understand why we are dying out.

By severely monitoring each other and how many litters we may have with these unspoken rules, we prevent ourselves from gaining experience by producing enough litters to understand where we are going and what we are doing. We also end up driving people to get puppies from puppy mills because we don't deem them good enough to get a puppy from us (and treat them rudely and disrespectfully), or because there simply aren't any puppies available from responsible breeders.

I am certainly not advocating irresponsible breeding or mass production of dogs, but when truly responsible breeders fulfill all of the good criteria listed above and do them well, do they justify producing litters?

Perhaps if breeders bred dogs we might see the return of the truly great dog. And just perhaps if we were kind and took time to educate people in preparation for puppy ownership of one of our well bred puppies, there wouldn't be so many people buying puppies at the pet store.

*Reprinted by permission of the author from the March 2007 AKC Gazette
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