

Some Thoughts on the Breeding of Dogs

This month I want to stray a bit from the subject of training and talk about breeding. As I write this at my kitchen table, beside me is a whelping box with 10, two-week-old German Wirehaired Pointer pups in it. My purpose for this article is to dispel some commonly held beliefs and provide some startling statistics.

First the statistics; depending on whose literature you read, there are between 5 and 10 million dogs and cats euthanized each year in animal shelters in this country. Five to ten million is a pretty big spread but the people doing this research have found that some shelters keep good records and some do not. Also, since there is no system in place to keep track of this information across the country, the studies done come up with different estimates. But no matter how you figure it, even 5 million animals being killed in shelters every year are too many. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that 25% of the dogs entering shelters are purebred. For you David Letterman fans, the National Council for Pet Population Study and Policy says one of the top ten reasons for dogs being surrendered to shelters is no homes for litters; which brings us back to breeding.

The first chapter in any book on dog breeding is devoted to providing food for thought on why you should or should not breed your dog. Sex education for the kids is not one of the reasons. Books, videos, the Animal Planet and Discovery Channel have you covered there. I am guessing you are not going to have Johnny or Suzy watch the conception process. I am sure you don't want them to see the family dog in the misery of labor, whelping a still born or mummified pup or dying herself; it happens.

Another common misconception is that you can make back your money you spent for the dog or for those a step further from reality, make a profit. Here is a list of my expenses beginning with health certificates leading up to this litter:

Health tests, blood work, x-rays, exams	\$575
Advertising in two hunting magazines	\$185
Artificial Insemination attempt (incl. blood tests)	\$485
Natural breeding (stud fee, blood work, exams)	\$1550
Advertising in two hunting magazines	\$215
C-Section delivery (this was not in the plan!)	\$1028
Tail docking and dew claws	\$195
Litter exam (diarrhea and two infected tails)	\$105
	\$4338

This figure does not include the gas food and lodging for the 4 day trip to Minnesota to have the bitch bred. Nor does it allow for the time and materials for the whelping box, bedding, heat lamp, or the mountain of laundry to keep the pups clean. Also, not factored in is the time and expense for the books read and the breeding seminar I attended. You may have noticed I did not even mention the months of training and showing this bitch to her various AKC titles including Conformation Champion and Master Hunter and the costs involved. Don't get me wrong, these were things I wanted to do, but from the perspective of making money, I will never break even on this venture. But then, I am not doing it for profit.

I have heard people say that they want to breed Sadie because she is a good dog. Well, she probably is a good dog. In fact, most of us have good dogs, just ask us. The question you must ask yourself is, "other than being a good dog, what does Sadie have to offer her breed?" Has she been judged by multiple experts to conform to her breed standard created by her national breed club? Sadie may be a decent hunting dog, but is that by your standards, your buddy's? Or has Sadie been judged in the field by non-biased people to the level of an AKC Senior or Master Hunter?

There are still those people who believe that because they own a registered purebred dog that it is automatically good breeding stock. That could not be further from the truth. Genetics being what they are, even if Rover's Grand-Sire was a show champion, Rover only has 1/4 of that Grand-sire's genes. They could be the good ones or maybe the bad ones. Rover's litter he sired with your buddy's bitch now has 1/8th of that champion Grand-sire's genes. Do you know anything about your buddy's dog's parents, grand-parents? Do they have health certificates for the diseases such as hip dysplasia that can occur in your breed?

As I step off my soap box, let me leave you with this final thought Whatever the breed that purebred dog is laying at your feet, its breed was developed over many years by dedicated breeders who knew that to get the best dog, you had to breed the best to the best. For just about as many years, there have been un-informed, less dedicated and less knowledgeable breeders that have been working against the breed. If you decide to breed your dog, please do your homework. Do the health testing recommended by your national breed club. Breed your titled dog to another titled and medically sound dog. Also, please screen your buyers to make sure those pups you produce are going to homes that you trust will give them the care they deserve. Reputable breeders do turn away unsuitable buyers. As for me, I have to go change the papers and wash the whelping box bedding for the fourth time today.

Have a safe and prosperous New Year.