Selection of a Stud

(Transcript from the 1981 Australasian Dalmatian Convention Papers)

Ladies and Gentlemen it gives me great pleasure to discuss the most important topic of selecting the Stud dog. So important is this fascinating aspect of breeding, that much more consideration should be given to this area than is usual. It is quite easy to see where serious thought has been given by breeders, because they continually produce good typical stock. I think you can classify people who breed dogs into three categories

1.      Those who give thought to what they are doing and do not have to seek advice, these you can call "Breeders". People usually fall into this category only after years of experience.

2.      Next you have people who do neither give thought nor care, who breed because "it would be nice for ëSuzyí to have a litter and being a bitch she must be bred". You can classify these people as "Fanciers".

3.      The third ones breed because a friend has a male, which is convenient, and not expensive. These people have $ signs in their eyes and are often the commencement of puppy mills.

Many considerations come to mind when you are thinking about a Stud, the most important of these are as follows:

**1.                Sound Temperament.**

**2.                Compatible bloodline, and genetic background.**

**3.                Physical conformation.**

**4.                General condition of health**

Take a good, long, hard look at the stud you are considering, and ask whether he generally fits into the criteria I have mentioned. Remember this is, or should be, the most serious step you are taking because , as a "Breeder", you are progressing in your breed and continually striving to improve, which must always be your goal. You are never breeding just to have a litter or because itís the "thing" to do. Think very carefully before breeding, do not rush into it. Future generations of your breed are in your hands.

**Sound Temperament**
 is my first criteria. Regardless of the external beauty of the Stud, you should investigate his genetic background as much as possible. He should not be used at all if there is any history of unsoundness in temperament. I have known dogs to pass on undesirable traits, generation after generation, and I imagine some of you here today have had similar experiences. Unsound temperament can lie dormant for a considerable amount of time and can be triggered suddenly (many generations away), for an obscure reason.

Just because a dog may be a "winner" in the show ring, does not necessarily mean he should be bred. Indeed, he may always be the perfect model to judge, who, after all, may only see him for a few moments. However, should he display any signs of unsoundness in behaviour in his usual environment, or you discover this in his background, forget him as a stud. In years to come, you being serious, considerate breeders will be pleased you did not use the dog. The wisdom of carrying out such research, using only tractable dogs, without any signs of "rat bag" tendencies will be patently obvious to you.

**Compatibility of bloodlines**
 and genetic background would most probably be my next most important criteria. My experience has been that the best stock is produced by direct line breeding usually. This theory has also been proved in the breeding of cattle and horses. I have found that I can line breed for five generations before having to obtain an infusion of new blood.

Having obtained the new blood and using my theory, you can then come straight back into your established line. So, you should study the pedigree of both your bitch and the intended Stud. Look for common ancestry if possible. Provided that your bitch and the Stud meet the demands you have formulated go ahead, always remembering you are breeding to improve.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and can lead to kennel blindness, a luxury serious breeders cannot afford. Look closely at dog and bitch, do not overlook the serious faults, you will only promulgate them if you do. Do not be influenced by well meaning friends who may just be disguising a jealousy and may convince you not to approach the owner of a Stud. If you believe a particular dog is the Stud you want for your bitch the use him if you can. Too often, owners of Studs are not approached because of some personality differences, and many ideal breeding are sadly not carried out because of this reason, much to the detriment of a breed.

Keep an open mind with your breeding, sometimes a Stud is expected to perform miracles,- your puppies do have a mother. I will discuss the influence a dam has on the litter later on. Sometimes you can get an idea on how your puppies could look if you are able to see the "get" form similar breedings. You should also appreciate that repeat matings will not necessarily have the same result as the first breeding. Nature, being nature, is not always perfect and allows for diversions from the norm.

Breeding and selection is based upon he phenomenon of variations, and the total variation within a breed can be attributed to three components:

1.                Genetic variation

2.                Environmental variation

3.                Gene-environment inter-actions.

 Since puppies of the same litter develop under the same maternal environment and as they are essentially reared under the same kennel environment, we can concentrate on the genetic component for the purpose of this discussion. Being serious breeders, we must learn to manipulate this variation. Perhaps one of the most important misconceptions is
 the male is more important genetically in mating than the female. This idea probably had its origin in the fact that a male normally produces more offspring in his lifetime than the female. However, for any one mating we must say the parents are essentially equal, since each contributes one half of the inheritance of each progeny.

Remember when selecting individuals for a mating to give both parents equal consideration. If the bitch has too many problems do not breed her at all.

The serious breeder should make every effort to know the inferior genes his dogs are carrying, as well as their superior genes. Only by knowing the complete genetic story can a breeder make intelligent breeding decisions which will assist in "fixing" desirable genes lurking in the shadow, remembering always that you will not necessarily eliminate the undesirable genes.

A further misconception, common to the thinking of novice breeders, is that the kennel names in a pedigree are of great importance. The kennel name tells you who owns the dog, and nothing more, and has nothing to do with the genetic worth of the dog as a breeder. Do not be misled into thinking that just because a dog is owned by a particular kennel, he
must be outstanding breeding stock. The integrity and reputation of the kennel should be taken into account in your business dealings, and particularly where the authenticity of the pedigrees are concerned. This is most important. You will observe if the owner is just after a Stud fee or has the breed at heart when he looks at your bitch. Remember his dog has
already sired litters and if an honest and dedicated kennel he should be able to give you every help and assistance. As far as the dogs are concerned, the only factors to consider are whether they have the correct body type and their ancestry. When a dog is bred, he transmits genes not kennels. I realise it is nigh impossible to carry out this exercise with imported studs, but even in this situation as much care as possible should be taken.

**Physical conformation.**
The Stud should excel in body type, and have attributes which will compliment those your bitch may lack. When choosing your Stud you should study his breeding record, his percentages of proven quality, conformation, temperament and movement. What do we breed toward? The standard has been written to give breeders a set of rules and guidelines to go by. It is written to standardise our efforts, so breeders will work together for the same goal and the same effect, so each individual within your breed will resemble each other. The concise Oxford Dictionary explains conformation as,
"manner" in which a thing is formed, structural parts, arranged in different individual shapes, react when put to use in different kinds of motion. All breeders should correctly know and understand conformation and movement so they can apply this knowledge and breed to their standard.

**General condition of health.**
Needless to say the general health of the Stud and bitch is of paramount importance, each should have a clean bill of health and communicable diseases should be in evidence.

Should the owner of the Stud not request a vaginal negative result from the bitch prior to mating be on guard, his dog could be carrying an infection from his last Stud and could transmit this to your bitch.

Remember the breeding of dogs with good intent, can mean many things to many people, but to all of us, is a fascination, because it deals with the "secret of life" itself. The secret, no matter how hard we try, will probably never be obtainable, but we must continually strive towards it. Try as we will to apply all the knowledge through experience, breeding and studying genetic theories, we are constantly reminded that the ultimate formula is just beyond our reach.

There is a strange obsession in every true breeder, an obsession that keeps the breeder thinking that the next litter will be the answer to his breeding hopes. This obsession will keep him going litter after litter, along with the love of the breed. There is no end to the knowledge of the art, the quality shows, according to the production and the work and the effect we put into it. Ladies and Gentlemen the future of your breed is in your hands.

**Maria Archer
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