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"SELECTING SIRE"

by
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Much can be said about this subject and all the considerations that are involved, but selecting the right sire will always begin by knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the bitch to be bred. If you don't know her strengths or weaknesses any sire will do. For example, if she has good over-all conformation and good breadth of pedigree, the job of finding the right sire is less difficult. On the other hand if she has some good traits and several faults, the job of finding the right sire requires more thought and research.

The task of finding the best sire always gets easier when you have a clear understanding of what it is that you expect to get in the litter. You can't have as your goal breeding a champion. You have to focus on the specific traits of conformation, health or temperament. A combination of these three generally works best. By using pedigree analysis techniques a breeder can learn about the qualities and the lack of qualities in the pedigree of the bitch as well as those in the pedigree of each sire that is being considered.

Because there is no direct way of looking into a pedigree to see if the desired genes or undesirable genes are present, an indirect method is needed. This means finding out about the phenotypes of the ancestors for three generations. It also includes learning about the littermates of the bitch and each sire that is being considered. The former approach is called pedigree depth and the latter is called breadth of pedigree. Both are important and useful methods.

As soon as the strengths and weaknesses of the bitch are known, a list of stud dog candidates can be developed. Start with a large number of good candidates. Ten may seem to be more than enough but you will find that ten is not too many. The list of candidates must be screened, sorted and then reduced to a smaller group, usually to the best 2 or 3. Experience teaches us that some will be better than others based on appearance, quality of pedigree, health history, and offspring produced.

The most popular reasons used to select a sire are listed:

1. Convenience - proximity to the residence of the bitch
2. Cost - the economics, the cheapest stud dog
3. Pedigree - number of champion ancestors
4. Offspring produced – quality pups

5. Ancestors/litter mates - known producers

By themselves these reasons are not sufficient for selecting a stud dog because none are sufficient to evaluate the faults and virtues of the bitch. Cost, convenience and show records are sometimes perceived as legitimate reasons by those who lack experience and knowledge. The best search for the right stud dog always includes knowledge about his traits, health history, temperament and the qualities seen in his offspring. Geography and economics have nothing to do with his genetics or his ability to compliment the strengths and offset the weaknesses of the bitch.

Developing a list of 10 stud dogs begins by contacting breeders, handlers and judges who are knowledgeable about the breed. Stud dog advertisements usually promise more than they can produce. As a general rule, one should be cautious about those who recommend their own dogs because of their vested interest in the matter. Once a list of 10 dogs has been developed, each should be checked against those traits and characteristics which are considered to be important to the breeding. Sometimes they are also related to a breed's function (sound hips, temperament, size, strength etc). The diseases to be checked should be those that are specific to the breed. In the final analysis the ideal stud dog should be able to compliment the strengths of the bitch and offset her faults.

Evaluating stud dogs must be systematic and include the careful examination of his pedigree including the relationship of his ancestors to each other. If there are common relatives in his pedigree that have produced serious health problems, poor temperaments or life threatening diseases take them off the list. When you are finished write down what is known about each pedigree in a summary statement. Compare the pedigree of each sire with what is needed to compliment the pedigree of the bitch. This is a sorting process that will result in finding one or two candidates that have the best health histories, temperament, breed traits and progeny. What you will discover is that the most popular sires will usually be the ones that have produced more offspring than the others. There will also be more information about them than others who are less popular. In either case, as the facts are gathered and studied, the original list of stud dogs will be shortened.

Seeing the dogs firsthand has no substitute. Visit their kennels and watch them at shows. Remember that the skillful handling of these dogs in the ring by paid professionals and the limited amount of time allowed a judge makes the show ring the second best place to see and evaluate them. Even the best of breeders can miss an important fault that is carefully hidden. It is always best to see them in a more relaxed setting. Successful breeding programs always analyze the information collected.

The four steps generally used to check the desirability of sires and dams are:

- 1. Frequency of desired traits occurring among their ancestors (three-generation pedigree).**
- 2. Frequency of the desired traits found in their littermates.**
- 3. Number of carriers or affected littermates and ancestors (three generations pedigree).**
- 4. Number of pups produced with desired traits.**

When answers to the above are taken together, a reasonable projection can be made about their potential value. For example, if there are no ancestors or littermates with the desired traits, and if nothing is known about their health history or temperament, there is little reason to believe they will produce the traits desired. They should be removed from the list or placed near the bottom.

If Mendel were asked to suggest an approach he would probably begin by asking if the parents had produced offspring consistent in size, shape and color because he knew from his experiments that if the parents came from pedigrees that produced indifferent sizes, shapes and undesirable colors they should not be expected to produce individuals that would be similar each other or to their parents. He discovered this simple truth in the 1860's and it should not be ignored today. Illustrated in Figure 1 are 10 candidates that were considered in a search for the best stud dog for a hypothetical bitch. The reader should list the defects and traits considered important to his breed.

Figure 1. CHECK LIST AND CANDIDATES

Name of Sire	PRA	Liver	HD	Heart	Tail	Size	Shoulder	Back	Coat	Teeth
1. Ch. Way To Go	Carrier	Clear	OFA	NT	C	6/9	4/7	4/6	6/6	6/6
2. Ch. Nestle Quick	NT	NT	OFA	NT	I	2/9	M	2/7	5/6	6/6
3. Ch. Jump N Joy	NT	NT	OFA	NT	I	2/4	3/4	3/4	3/4	3/4
4. Ch. Nice Topper	NT	NC	NT	NC	I	3/4	1/4	3/9	M	M
5. Ch. Holly Top	Clear	Clear	NT	Clear	C	7/9	4/9	6/9	7/9	9/9
6. Van Joner's Que	Clear	Clear	OFA	NT	C	4/8	4/8	8/9	7/9	7/9
7. Ch. VanCleeve's Asa	Clear	Clear	OFA	Clear	C	8/10	6/10	6/8	7/9	9/9
8. Ch. Slade Rimee	NT	NT	OFA	M	C	M	9/10	M	3/9	6/9
9. Ch. Fryer We Not	NT	NC	NT	NT	I	1/5	2/9	1/9	3/9	3/9
10. Hope Well Bee	M	NT	NO	Clear	C	2/5	M	3/9	M	1/4

NC - not clear, NT - Not tested, C - Correct, I - Incorrect, M- Missing information

Analysis of the Candidates

Dogs number 1, 5, 6 and 7 have the best health histories and look very good on five of the six important breed traits. They also ranked highest for having the best ratios of offspring that meet desired breed characteristics. Sires # 2, 4, 8, 9 and 10 should not be considered further unless more information can be found. To use these 5 sires is equivalent to breeding blind. At first glance, sire # 3 looked like a promising candidate based on his offspring. He produced 2 of 4 offspring of the correct size, 3 of 4 with good shoulders and 2 of 4 with correct top lines, coat and feet. But look at his health history. This is what makes

him a risky choice. He has not been tested for PRA, liver or heart disease that are popular problems in his breed. His only health asset is that he was OFA certified normal for his hips. The final selection should come from sires 1,5,6 or 7. The most promising one is #7 based on health history and desired traits observed in his offspring. Selection of the right stud dog should be a slow and deliberate process. Temperament should not be overlooked in this process.

Some owners do not believe in testing their stud dogs on the grounds that it is too costly because they do not believe in the predictability of x-rays or the reliability of laboratory test results. Others will argue that their bloodlines and pedigrees are clear of carriers and defects and there is no need to waste their time and money on unnecessary tests. The stud dogs owned by these breeders should not be considered. I recall one breeder who told me that he did not check his dogs for HD because he "did not have HD in his lines". Later I learned that he usually sold his pups at 8 weeks of age. Since it is unlikely that HD or any other disease will occur prior to four months of age he misleads himself and others into believing what is not true.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carmen L Battaglia holds a Ph.D. and Masters Degree from Florida State University. As an AKC judge, researcher and writer, he has been a leader in promotion of breeding better dogs and has written many articles and several books. Dr. Battaglia is also a popular TV and radio talk show speaker. His seminars on breeding dogs, selecting sires and choosing puppies have been well received by the breed clubs all over the country. Those interested in learning more about his articles and seminars should visit the website <http://www.breedingbetterdogs.com>