

# On Being a Responsible Stud Dog Owner

BY STEPHANIE AND DAVID ABRAHAM

**N**o one but a novice would suggest that breeding dogs is easy. The conscientious dog owner undertakes a daunting responsibility when he advertises his pride and joy, Ch. Mr. Perfect, at stud. If his intent is simply to collect the imagined fat fees and smile all the way to the bank, he ignores many a pitfall, both practical and ethical, along the path to alleged financial security. Worthy pups do not spring full-blown from nowhere, and despite all the brag ads that seem to assert otherwise, puppies do have mothers.

In spite of this biological certainty, Mr. Perfect is apt to get all the credit and all the blame for the puppies he sires. With that in mind, his

*It's a daunting responsibility, but one that has joyous rewards.*

owner should take to heart the horseman's adage: "Breed the best to the best, and hope for the best." Though it may come as a shock to some, Mr. Perfect,

no matter how stunning, may not be the right choice for every bitch that comes calling. Nor should Mr. P's owner assume that he will want to do business with every bitch's management team.

## Assessing the Bitch

The stud dog owner must have a keen ability to assess the would-be mate in terms of both pedigree and conformation, and be candid and confident enough to inform an owner that his bitch may not be a good match for Mr. P. I stress conformation here, because there are too many breeders breeding "paper dogs," analyzing pedigrees to death and boasting of the numbers of champions behind a planned mating. For some breeders, not even a lifetime of breeding can substitute for a critical eye, sound judgement and common sense. The bitch (as well as the stud) must be a good representative of the breed type. The championship title is nice, but irrelevant if the quality is apparent.

# JUST SAY NO

Nor should it be mandatory that sires and grandsires sport "Ch." in front of their names. I have certainly known champions that were decidedly second-rate. The title is no guarantee of either type or temperament. If the bitch has a wry mouth and slinks around with her tail between her legs, why would Mr. P's owner want to risk his stud's reputation on such a creature? Likewise, if the bitch is lovely but Mr. P usually throws too much height, or a poor color, or a straight stifle when bred to that bitch's bloodline, his owner may want to think twice about such a breeding. At the very least, he should certainly have a frank conversation with the bitch's owners relative to the risks of such a combination.

Ideally, the owner of the stud dog should be an experienced breeder who has watched several generations of his breeding mature and reproduce.

He should have the experience to understand breed type; the cultivated eye to appreciate it when he sees it; and the tact and integrity to refuse to breed a bitch when type is lacking.

## Just Say No

The owner of Mr. P should remember that his dog will produce many pups in an average lifespan, far more than any bitch. There is little point in adding mediocre specimens to swelling population figures. Mr. P's owner, therefore, should be very discriminating when contemplating a request for stud service. Along with the many dedicated owners who will bring you a bitch to breed, there are the occasional owners who should be refused a breeding no matter how hard they plead their case.

If someone calls regarding stud service, Mr. P's owner, in addition to finding out about the bitch, ought to learn something about her human family, as well. Is a secure area set aside for whelping? Will very young children have unsupervised access to the litter? Is the owner receptive to advice and willing to assume the financial burden of a healthy litter?

If the stud dog's owner suspects that the bitch's owners will care little for the puppies, wanting only to know how much money they will bring in, a red light should come on over the kennel door: *No admittance!* These pups are the ones likely to end up in a pet store, or even the pound, if they are not out of the house in six weeks. I have also learned the hard way that when one spouse is dying to have puppies and

the other is dying *not* to, the dogs are the ones that suffer in the long run. Mr. P's sperm should not be sold to make puppies unless they will be loved and cared for properly.

The stud dog owner's responsibilities extend, as well, to being aware of the diseases and abnormalities peculiar to his breed and to sharing this information with novices. Most breeds of pure-bred dogs have genetic defects resulting in medical problems such as hip dysplasia, PRA, congenital heart disease and a host of other physical disabilities.

Experienced breeders are well aware of these shortcomings and, happily, there are often (but not always) medical tests available to determine if one's own dog is afflicted. These tests should be performed on potential stud dogs and brood bitches

before breeding is considered. The AKC *Awards* magazine now publishes OFA and CERF certification as a matter of public record; as a result, it is now much easier to check up on hip and eye clearances.

If a stud dog fails one of the definitive medical tests for his breed, he should no longer be a stud dog. As breeders, we can ill afford to produce puppies with serious heritable defects. Even if a litter from suspect parents appears normal, the resulting offspring may be carriers of a particular recessive problem that may wreak havoc in future generations—juvenile cataracts, for example. Even if you, as a breeder, are willing to take the risk, think of the pets you may sell into loving homes and the owners who may have to face the deterioration, even death, of their beloved pet.

## Clearing Communicable Diseases

Having addressed hereditary problems—ideally even before the animals are of breeding age—the stud dog's owner must be alert, as well, to the dangers of communicable disease. To this end, all stud dog owners should require that any bitches brought to them for service should be tested clear of brucellosis, a serious and contagious disease that can cause sterility, spontaneous abortion and prostatitis, among other problems. Failure of the stud dog owner to be vigilant and insistent may cause a premature end to the breeding careers of both dog and bitch. Keeping this sobering point in mind, in fact, is extremely helpful when doing business with friends—a potentially thorny situation. *All*



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visiting bitches, without exception, should be tested clear of brucellosis. "Of course I know how immaculately you keep little Bitsy," you might say, "but I have to be able to assure total strangers that all bitches sent to Mr. P are brucellosis-free. I'm sure you understand."

Mr. P himself should be checked by a veterinarian at least yearly, and perhaps as often as every six months, to determine his reproductive health. He should be free of parasites, any communicable diseases and, of course, he should be fertile.

Puppies on the ground are the best barometer of fertility, but in the absence of regular breeding, or in the event of misses, Mr. P should have a semen evaluation to check sperm count and motility, infection and any other possible abnormality in the sample. If a given bitch comes up empty, it is helpful to be able to say that Mr. P has recently been evaluated. Bitch owners who have paid good money for a stud fee and have nothing to show for it 63 days later are usually *not* going to blame their own little darlings—no matter that they forgot to count the first five days of her season, or that, as you had discovered in a preliminary interview, she missed the last three stud dogs to whom she was bred.

#### **The Essential Contract**

Speaking of blame, the only certain way to avoid a misunderstanding of each party's responsibilities is through the use of a stud contract. I cannot stress strongly enough that a written agreement between the owners of both the stud dog and brood bitch is essential. And if the respective owners know each other personally, even intimately, it is *more* essential. Many a friendship has been threatened because of avoidable misunderstandings.

The contract should cover the fee, if one is involved, and when it is to be paid (usually at the time of service). The contract should spell out that said fee is being paid for a service alone, not as a guarantee of live puppies. If Mr. P's owner is a nice guy, he may offer a free return service in the event of a miss. He should also include what constitutes a litter (how many pups living) and whether or not he will offer a free return in the event that whelping difficulties lead to neonatal deaths.

If no fee is involved and a puppy is to go back to Mr. P's house as a stud-fee puppy,

it should be clear whether or not this puppy is a first, a second or a third choice of the litter, and when this choice is to be made. And what if there is only one puppy? In short, the stud contract can say whatever the parties involved wish it to say, but it should be clear, precise and complete.

With business out of the way, frank and frequent communication between the bitch and stud dog owners is vital for the safety and well-being of the animals. Prior to her arrival, Mr. P's owner must ask whether or not the bitch is on any special medication; whether or not she may be aggressive to dogs or people; whether or not she is known to breed willingly; and whether or not she has special dietary requirements. Sometimes, what the bitch owner may consider trivial may have far-reaching consequences.

About 15 years ago, a sweet, happy bitch was shipped to us for breeding. After an uneventful, enthusiastic service, she was locked securely in her crate in the safety of our kitchen. Upon returning from dinner two or three hours later, we were more than a little startled to discover her frolicking alone in our yard. Fearing burglary or worse, we were relieved to find all exterior

doors locked and nothing amiss inside—with one exception. "Poopsie" had demolished her crate, climbed up on the kitchen counter and pushed through the window screen. Only after we informed the owner did he think to mention that Poopsie did not like crates and was somewhat of an escape artist.

Mr. P's owner, then, far from being a lazy collector of easy money, is at once an advisor, a caregiver, a psychologist, a geneticist, a veterinarian and a lawyer. Nonetheless, despite all of these divergent roles, there is probably nothing he enjoys as much or finds more rewarding than seeing the offspring of his stud dog perform well both inside and out of the show ring. I have personally taken considerable pride in the achievements of my own Mr. Ps, and in their progeny. When I look at a young hopeful and see the grandsire's expression, or head carriage, or perfect feet or lilted way of looking at life, I thank Mr. P for doing his work well. 🐶



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*Stephanie and David Abraham are both longtime Boxer breeders; Mrs. Abraham is also a judge of Boxers, as well as the American Boxer Club's breed columnist for the GAZETTE.*