

The Barbet: Love is not a Requirement

Breeding 2 dogs together to make a puppy is not a mindless game, nor one of love and attraction.

A lot of time, thought, attention to details and research goes into each choice that a breeder makes.

Of course, I can't speak for all breeders of all breeds....but many that I know and work with, are of this mindset.

The pursuit of an excellent match producing excellent pups is always a factor in breeding, not withstanding the absolute importance of health, temperament and instinct of the breeds' character, for one is as important as the other.

The details of each breed vary, the history and lineages are individual to a breed, and this is where the research and attention to genotype comes in. Knowing true and factual information - carriers, causes of illness/death, etc are very important when considering a match. With no history, there is no future.

There are also the details of the here and now. The temperament, character, instinct and ability of the dogs you are considering, as well as their siblings, parents and aunts/uncles, etc. Heredity is not only the good half of mom and half dad, so the good, the bad and the ugly of all have to be considered.

Thankfully lots of science has gone into dog breeding, so we have formulations and tested theories that have been proven accurate for breeding.

Phenotype plays a big role in getting the desired pups from a breeding also. If the 2 dogs you are considering mating both share the same fault/negative trait/issue, the likelihood of producing that is greater, and in higher numbers. Sounds obvious, but surprisingly some breeders who breed for colour,

lines or workability in a breed completely forget the standard when making their choices, and end up with many offspring of undesirable shapes and sizes.

Combining several methods, I've been using this chart for a few years now, assessing and "cutting apart" puppies to find the best of the litter.

Thankfully, breeders today not only have the history of their breed, breeders and production to work with, but also advances in science, genetics and communication around the world. Breeding today has never been so easy, yet so difficult.

Using the methods I have in place, I take the pups at 7 weeks (exactly 49 days) and have the Volhard Test Applied to each individual pup. It is always in a strange place and with a tester they are not familiar with. While I look on and record results (from a location close enough to see, but not close enough to be seen) I fill in the Volhard score results. There is a great deal of science that speaks to instinct pre-50 days old.

Also on that testing page is a 6 part dissected diagram of the pup's body, and so once the testing is completed, we put each pup on the table, and check for these things: *Straight front, 50% pup above and below midline (imaginary line drawn on pup). *Straight rear. Shoulder Angulation and Layback. Croup Angulation and Rear Angulations, Tail set. I also check for testicles on males, ear set and length, clear definition of eyes and check the bite.

Then, again at 8 weeks (56 days +/- 2 days) the pups are taken to a place they are not familiar with and tested again, by someone they are not familiar with.

Using five separate testing positions: Picked up and held in a cradle position, Suspension; by chin and crotch into mid-air, Free stand/walk around on table, Face to face; held under front legs looking straight

at tester, Stack position (placed there by tester, on purpose), each response and reaction is noted on testing sheet to be analyzed later.

Once the five required positions are achieved, and noted, each pup is again set up in a natural stack position. Photos are taken (see photos) Each photo is dissected with vector lines. (Cheese or some other treat is very helpful to maintain a still position.)

Secondly, each pup must be judged against the standard: The structure: hocks, cupling, topline, length of ears, muzzle, prosternum, bite and the Features: tail set, coat; texture, type and colour, ear set, paws.

There is no perfect dog, however, there are some criterium that cannot be overlooked, and others that are minor and may be used, if only once to propigate the positives, and rule out or breed out the negatives. Show quality and breeding quality pups must reach a certain level of excellence in phenotype, that is a fact. The breed standard is a breeders' "bible" so to say, and so phenotype not withstanding genotype is of the utmost importance.

Breeding is a huge undertaking and responsibility. It must be regarded with integrity, honour and respect. Our job as humans is to help and continue our breeds' existence to the best of our ability.

*Straight (not in regards to angulations here; elbows, paws, hocks and stifles in line with the body - straight "pillar" legs)