

BREEDING FOR EXCELLENCE: Selecting the Stud Dog

Mrs. W.E. Mackay-Smith (RECORD 1987)

This is a difficult process at best and when it comes down to the fine point, it really depends on your bitch – and your own ability to make an objective assessment of her faults and virtues in the cold light of day. Once this is done, you must go through the list of available stud dogs and find one or more with strong points where your bitch has faults. Of these, you want to tend toward one that shares her virtues, and if one of these is from a similar bloodline, so much the better.

Some breeders do this in the opposite order, looking first at the dogs available from the same bloodline and limiting the secondary selection to these dogs. Our feeling is that this procedure is too narrow in scope and many times breeding a linebred bitch to a *prepotent* outcross will produce a successful outcome which broadens the genetic pool available in subsequent breedings. Since we are more interested in the gradual building of a solid, reliable gene pool, we have been willing to use the occasional outstanding dog as an outcross, granting we may not hit the jackpot in the first generation, but giving us a diversity of opportunities in subsequent breedings with the progeny.

The broad criteria which we use to select the list of finalists are the same which have served well both in judging and in selecting puppies. Head qualities, Bone and Substance, Soundness, Make and Shape, and Temperament. For us, the last of these is key, and so we have resisted the temptation to breed to excellent physical specimens who have exhibited or produced temperament problems.

The stud dog prospect, once having passed the temperament test, should then be assessed in each of the four remaining categories: 1) Head: he should have a good strong typical head. If he doesn't the chances of getting one in the puppies are diminished considerably. 2) Bone and Substance: the whole physical point of a Bull Terrier is strength and power with agility. It's hard to have the basic impact without bone and substance. This does **not** mean size per se. It means the maximum dog in the available space. 3.) Soundness: a high priority in our kennel. The stud dog selectee must be reasonably sound, even if the bitch is extra sound. This means he must have a reasonably good front with good, strong, agile hind-quarters and he must move with power and drive – not putter along with a short stilted gait. 4.) Make and

Shape: For me, the delight in a good Bull Terrier is body shape. I do not want to breed dogs with turned-over heads on bodies that look like over-stuffed sausages. Spring of rib, shortness of back, depth of brisket and tuck-up in underline are all part of make-and-shape. These things are genetic. They are inherited both singly and in combination. So why not lean toward a stud dog who has the necessary components for this essential assembly?

The final thing which we consider in these general categories is **genetic integrity**. A dog whose pedigree, conformation, behavior or progeny-record indicates the presence of a disabling disease (such as luxating patellae, rage, kidney failure, hearing impairment, gastric or frank epilepsy, entropion or spinning) is given short-shrift in our calculations. The problems which ensue, once you have a recessive gene for a disabling genetic disease in your line, will force your future breeding program to become defensive rather than progressive. You end up dodging bullets when you line-breed and double up on those recessive diseases. Believe me, you will have enough surprises without stacking the deck!

The secondary things to look for are pretty obvious. If your bitch has a good expression and a bad mouth, you can tolerate a round eye in her mate. But he must have a good mouth. If she has splayed feet, you need a mate with tight feet, if she is straight in stifle, you need a well-bent stifle. A word of warning. Don't get caught up in minutiae. You don't want to lose track of the primary virtues: a good strong well-shaped head, bone and substance, soundness and temperament. Go for these first and only then start in on the secondary issues. i.e. ear and tail placement, nose color, coat qualities, etc.

Throughout this whole process you must keep foremost in your mind that the stud dog can only **INFLUENCE** the outcome – he can't do it all! So, while you are being so particular about the stud dog, it doesn't hurt to have another long look at your bitch. If she were a male and belonged to one of your rivals, would you use him (her)? If the answer is 'No', perhaps you had better think twice – because she is 50% of the deal!

Remember, it's not possible to hit a royal flush if half the deck are Old Maid cards!