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BREEDING FROM YOUR BITCH

Breeding a litter of puppies can be very rewarding, but you need to remember that it can also be a costly and time consuming experience. The Kennel Club is committed to supporting responsible breeders to help ensure that all dogs - now and in the future are fit, healthy and cared for. If you are contemplating breeding, there are certain questions that you will need to ask yourself before proceeding:

Have I the time to devote to a litter until the puppies are old enough to go to their new homes, which is usually around eight weeks?

Am I knowledgeable enough to advise new owners about caring for their puppies, including rearing, diet, training and health problems?

Can I afford to pay for the recommended health tests for the bitch prior to mating her and, where necessary, for her litter?

Do I know enough to help the bitch during the whelping, if necessary?

Can I afford to pay for a caesarean should the dam have difficulty whelping the litter?

Could I cope with a very large litter of, say, 10 or 12 puppies?

Do I have sufficient knowledge to rear the litter correctly, including worming, vaccinations and socialisation?

Would I be able to find good homes for the puppies?

Am I in a position to take back or re-home any puppies if it becomes necessary?

If you have not been able to say yes to all of the above questions, then breeding may not be for you. You may therefore wish to consider having your bitch spayed to prevent unwanted or unplanned pregnancies; your breed club or the breeder of your bitch may be able to provide you with further expert advice.

If you have been able to say yes to all of the above questions, do not forget that you will also need to keep the following in mind:

Responsible breeders believe that each new litter that they breed should be an improvement on the parents.

Responsible breeders give careful consideration to health issues, temperament and soundness.

Responsible breeders plan ahead of each mating so as to ensure that each puppy produced will be bred in the best possible environment.

Responsible breeders accept responsibility for a puppy which they have bred, and make themselves available to give advice, help and information to new owners.

Still interested in breeding? Then read on!

The Kennel Club does not keep general information relating to breeding from bitches as this can vary tremendously from breed to breed. However, the following information may be of some help to you when planning to breed from your bitch.

Breed specifics:

There are a number of general books on breeding currently available. Additionally, you will find that there are many breed specific books that contain chapters, that relate to breeding.

Before breeding from your bitch, the Kennel Club advises that you check with your veterinary surgeon, your breed club and/or your dog's breeder to find out whether there are any possible inherited conditions that may affect your breed, for which there is an available test (e.g. hip dysplasia and eye conditions). There are several health schemes currently in operation to assist in the prevention or control of some diseases (including DNA tests), and where they exist, the Kennel Club strongly recommends that both sire and dam are tested.

Details of approximate stud fees, puppy prices and more detailed information on your chosen breed may be obtained from the breeder of your dog or from the breed clubs.

Becoming a member of a breed club will enable you to learn more about your breed and allow you to contact other owners and breeders. Telephone numbers for these clubs can be obtained via the Kennel Club's call centre - 0844 463 3980 - or from the Breed Standards web pages.

Before thinking about breeding from your bitch, you should acquaint yourself with the Kennel Club Rules and Regulations on registering litters and the registration system in general. You will need to remember that the Kennel Club will not accept an application to register a litter when:

- a) The bitch has already whelped six litters, or
- b) The bitch was under a year old at the date of mating, or
- c) The bitch has already reached the age of eight years at the date of whelping.

N.B. Relief from the last restriction may be considered if an application is received by the Kennel Club prior to mating and provided the dam has previously whelped at least one other registered litter, and the application is supported by veterinary evidence confirming the suitability of the bitch involved in the proposed whelping. Ensure that your bitch is registered in your own name and that the stud dog is also Kennel Club registered and that the owners details are correct.

You will also need to ensure that your bitch's Kennel Club registration does not carry any breeding restrictions. If there are any, you will need to discuss this further with the person from whom you obtained the bitch, as any breeding restrictions will need to be removed before registration of a litter can take place. In most cases it will be the breeder who has placed the restriction, and they will therefore be the person empowered to remove it.

Stud dogs:

The Kennel Club does not currently keep a register of stud dogs and therefore you should contact either your dog's breeder or a breed club to ensure that you find a suitable mate for your bitch. As a responsible breeder, you will need to ensure that any stud dog that you decide to use not only has a compatible pedigree, but has also been examined for any inherited disease to which the breed is subject.

Remember that male dogs may also carry breeding restrictions, and therefore you will need to bear in mind that any breeding endorsements will have to be removed from his registration records before the litter can be registered. You are strongly advised to confirm, prior to the mating, that any such endorsement has been removed.

General Advice:

The Kennel Club would advise that if you are using another owner's stud dog, or when it comes to selling your puppies, you ensure that anything agreed between the parties is recorded in a written contract.

This way, there can be no misunderstandings between either party should the worst occur. This is especially important if you are selling any puppies that you have endorsed with the Kennel Club, and in fact forms part of the KC Regulation when applying to place endorsements.

The average day on which to mate a bitch is between the 11-14 day of her season. However, judging the correct day to mate your bitch can sometimes be difficult as some can be ready to be mated on day 7 and some bitches will not accept a dog until day 21. It may therefore be prudent to have an ovulation test carried out by your veterinary surgeon to determine the correct date on which to mate your bitch, especially if the stud dog lives a fair distance away.

Bitches are in whelp for approximately 63 days, although it is not uncommon for them to whelp up to 3 or 4 days early (especially if the bitch is expecting a large litter) or several days late, if perhaps a smaller litter is expected.

Accredited Breeder Scheme:

The Kennel Club Accredited Breeder Scheme promotes good breeding practice and, as a breeder, you may wish to consider joining. There are set requirements that Accredited Breeders must agree to follow, which encourage the breeding of healthy, well-adjusted puppies. In return, Accredited Breeders may use the scheme literature and logo to promote their breeding. Details of the current scheme requirements can be obtained from the Kennel Club's Health and Information Department or can be downloaded below.

Current health screening requirements and recommendations (PDF format) <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/download/1100/abshealthreqs.pdf>

Visit <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/accreditedbreederscheme> or call 0844 463 3980 and you will be sent one of our Puppy Packs.

The law:

Under the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999, those breeders breeding five or more litters per year may need to be licensed. However, a local authority may still classify a breeder as being commercial - and therefore requiring a licence - even if the person breeds fewer than five litters per year, if in the local authority's opinion that person is deemed as breeding for commercial gain.

If breeders are in any doubt as to their eligibility under the Act, the Kennel Club advises that they contact their local Environmental Health Office for further clarification. If you need to be licensed, the Kennel Club advises that you obtain a copy of the Act so that you are fully aware of its contents and your responsibilities.

Finding good homes for your puppies:

It is vitally important that you find the right home for your puppies. Hopefully this will determine where they will spend the rest of their life, and you will want to ensure that the puppy will be happy in that environment.

As a guideline, you may wish to think about some of the following when making your decision:

Find out if the people who want to buy the puppy have done their "homework" on their chosen breed. Try to meet the whole family, including any children if possible.

Ask potential owners if they have any other dogs / pets. Find out whether the dog is wanted purely as a pet, or whether they may be interested in breeding at a later stage. You may have placed endorsements on the puppy's registration certificate and these will need to be explained to the new owner before or at the date of sale.

Do not mislead people regarding the dog's characteristics and the care it requires (particularly of the coat). Incomplete information for the new owner may result in the puppy being returned to you, or being sold on. Find out if the potential owner has the time and inclination to groom an adult dog (particularly long coated breeds).

Find out how much time they spend at home. It is not necessarily a bad thing if they are out all day, provided they can take the dog to work with them. Find out more about where they live, for example do they have a fenced garden? Some breeders like to conduct a home check before selling a puppy (you could always ask for photographs if it is not possible for you to visit the house in person). Do not automatically rule out flat dwellers - as long as they are willing and able to walk the dog regularly they may be able to offer a suitable home. It can even be the case that the dog is better off as it cannot just be put out in the garden for exercise!

Finally, if you are not sure that the home is right for the puppy, then do not sell it.

All breeders who register their puppies, and new owners who register ownership of their dogs with the Kennel Club, accept the jurisdiction of the Kennel Club and undertake to abide by its general Code of Ethics.

Breeders/Owners:

Will properly house, feed, water and exercise all dogs under their care and arrange for appropriate veterinary attention if and when required.

Will agree without reservation that any veterinary surgeon performing an operation on any of their dogs which alters the natural conformation of the animal, may report such operation to the Kennel Club.

Will agree that no healthy puppy will be culled. Puppies which may not conform to the Breed Standard should be placed in suitable homes.

Will abide by all aspects of the Animal Welfare Act.

Will not create demand for, nor supply, puppies that have been docked illegally.

Will agree not to breed from a dog or bitch which could be in any way harmful to the dog or to the breed.

Will not allow any of their dogs to roam at large or to cause a nuisance to neighbours or those carrying out official duties.

Will ensure that their dogs wear properly tagged collars and will be kept leashed or under effective control when away from home.

Will clean up after their dogs in public places or anywhere their dogs are being exhibited.

Will only sell dogs where there is a reasonable expectation of a happy and healthy life and will help with the rehoming of a dog if the initial circumstances change.

Will supply written details of all dietary requirements and give guidance concerning responsible ownership when placing dogs in a new home.

Will ensure that all relevant Kennel Club documents are provided to the new owner when selling or transferring a dog, and will agree, in writing, to forward any relevant documents at the earliest opportunity, if not immediately available.

Will not sell any dog to commercial dog wholesalers, retail pet dealers or directly or indirectly allow dogs to be given as a prize or donation in a competition of any kind.

Will not sell by sale or auction Kennel Club registration certificates as stand alone items (not accompanying a dog).

Will not knowingly misrepresent the characteristics of the breed nor falsely advertise dogs nor mislead any person regarding the health or quality of a dog.

Breach of these provisions may result in expulsion from club membership, and/or disciplinary action by the Kennel Club and/or reporting to the relevant authorities for legal action, as appropriate.

THINKING OF USING YOUR DOG AT STUD

You will probably find that breeders or breeding kennels are not usually interested in using privately owned dogs for stud purposes, unless the dog has some special qualifications or show merit, or has the pedigree that they require for their breeding programme.

Before breeding from your dog, the Kennel Club advises that you check with your veterinary surgeon, your breed club and/or your dog's breeder to find out whether there are any possible inherited conditions that may affect your breed, for which there is an available test (e.g. hip dysplasia and eye conditions). There are several health schemes currently in operation to assist in the prevention or control of some diseases (including DNA tests), and where they exist, the Kennel Club strongly recommends that both sire and dam are tested. You will find that the owners of most bitches would only wish to use those dogs that have been examined under the appropriate schemes. Similarly as a responsible dog owner, you should ensure that any bitch to which your dog is to be mated has also been tested under these schemes.

In order to register your dog's progeny with the Kennel Club, you will need to ensure that the dog is in your registered ownership. You will also need to ensure that your dog's Kennel Club registration does not carry any breeding restrictions.

If there are any, you will need to discuss this further with the person from whom you obtained the dog, as any breeding restrictions will need to be removed before the registration of a litter can take place. In most cases it will be the breeder who has placed the restriction, and they will therefore be the person empowered to remove it.

The terms and conditions of a mating do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Kennel Club. It is therefore advisable that any breeding terms or stud fees should be arranged by mutual agreement in writing between the owner of the dog and the owner of the bitch before the mating takes place.

As a general point, if a dog has not previously been used at stud, the owner might charge a nominal fee covering expenses etc. Once the dog has been proven (i.e. has produced puppies), the stud fee may be reviewed for any future matings according to the value of the dog as a proven sire, and the quality of his progeny.

A guide to an appropriate stud fee may be obtained from studying the advertisement columns in the canine press, as breeders may advertise their dogs for stud.

Alternatively you can contact your nearest breed club, who may be able to give you advice on this and any other matters relating to your breed.

Addresses and telephone numbers of breed club secretaries can be obtained from the Kennel Club - call 0844 463 3980 or visit the Breed Standards web pages.

Food for thought...

The following article was written by Mr M Stockman MRCVS and gives a further insight into using your dog at stud:

To the uninitiated it would seem that the best way of making money out of the dog game is to own a successful dog of a popular breed. You simply advertise him as being available at public stud and then sit back and watch the fees roll in! It costs no more to keep him than if he were not at stud, the bitches do the travelling and you get your fee when the mating is complete, not when the litter is born... what could be easier?

Doubtless there are people who try to do just that; and there are probably those who actually get away with it. But what should happen? What should the dog owner do in order to make certain that he or she is doing the best for the breed?

First of all let's ask a few pertinent questions:

Is the dog fertile? Is he possessed of the libido to do the job effectively? The mere fact that he has a tendency to chase every bitch in sight whether she's in season or not, doesn't necessarily mean that he will have a clue what to do when it comes to the point; and if the owner hasn't either, frustration of all concerned is liable to be the order of the day.

To be honest, you can read up just so much about mating techniques, but the experience of a knowledgeable breeder and stud dog handler is the most useful asset you can have. In truth, the only really fool proof way of finding out what your dog is like at stud, is to give him the chance with a sensible bitch (preferably not a maiden herself) and see that you enlist experienced help if you possibly can. As far as finding out whether your dog is fertile, you can take all the samples you like, but there is no substitute for the real thing in the shape of a litter in the nest.

But, that said, shouldn't we be looking a lot further back before we get this far?

Have we checked with fellow breed enthusiasts about what hidden problems there may be within the breed? Has the dog been examined under the relevant health schemes which are appropriate to the breed. i.e hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and inherited eye disease. In one or two breeds it would be sound policy to have the heart tested, and in addition, there are now several DNA tests available to help eliminate inherited diseases in many breeds. I am not trying to suggest that these examinations are universally needed, but most of us, if we are honest, know which problems occur in the breeds in which we have a special interest.

Even if the dog turns out to be a paragon of virtue, is he of such merit that he truly offers the future generation real benefit? It is undoubtedly very flattering to have somebody come up to you just after you have won yet another puppy or junior class and ask if the apple of your eye is available at stud. If the enquirer is one of the better known and successful breeders in your breed, it is usually a feather in your dog's cap; if on the other hand, the question comes from the sort of person who runs to every new champion in the making, be careful. Used on the wrong bitches, he may well sire progeny which will do him no good at all. Be ready with an answer, which gives you a "get-out", such as seeing how the pedigree would click, before the question is ever asked.

If you have done all the right things in relation to health testing, don't let your dog down by allowing him to be used on bitches which have not had similar tests.

I know all the stories about how "this person arrived with the bitch already in season, and she had never heard about hip dysplasia, and anyway it was only a pet bitch so they weren't interested in all this posh Kennel Club stuff"!

And then they go on: "after all it's better that they should use a dog that had been scored than one that had-

n't; and if I had refused they would have only gone to the next dog down the road". Well let them!

There will still be those who will merely say: "Oh, that's just Stockman rabbiting on about inherited disease; the vets are all the same." But surely those who put their dogs at stud in whatever sphere ought to take some responsibility for what they sire.

However busy life may be for a breeder, it doesn't take long to keep a reasonably accurate check on what a dog's offspring do. It is lovely to see his progeny winning in the ring. In some ways it's even better than doing the winning yourself. We all like to hear when the good news comes. It's not so funny when we learn that one's favourite has sired a cryptorchid, an epileptic, or a dysplastic. Note that I said that he'd sired it; that doesn't mean he is necessarily the one who is responsible for the defect. We don't know enough about the genetics of many conditions to be able to say whether or not both sire and dam must have contributed to the problem. So the sire should not be condemned unless it is positively known that the genetic input responsible for a particular defect has to come from both parents.

However, we blame bitch owners for mating their bitches without having any idea of who's going to be in the queue for the pups when they are whelped, and rightly so in many cases. If the owner of the sire had questioned the mating, had tried to dissuade the eager novice-breeder, or would take responsibility for helping find the right homes, the rescue services wouldn't be strained to bursting point.

Although this article was written several years ago, it is still relevant in today's society, and definitely provides food for thought.

The Kennel Club does not currently keep a register of stud dogs and therefore if you wish to use your dog at stud you should contact your local breed club for more information and advice.