

Choosing the Right Sire

It's not the weight of the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it

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By

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There are two reasons that will cause most people to hesitate when selecting a stud dog. The first is the uncertainty of possible health problems and the other does not know if they will produce the traits that needed.

But regardless of the lack of information and these concerns, the selection of the right sire begins by knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the bitch to be bred. If she has well over all conformation, health and temperament the job of finding the right sire is less difficult. If she has some good traits and several faults, the job of finding the right one requires more research.

The selection process should begin with a clear understanding of what is expected from the breeding and what the bitch has to offer. Using pedigree analysis techniques a breeder can learn about the qualities and the lack of qualities in her pedigree as well as those of each sire being considered.

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 once you begin to check them out. Developing a list of 10 stud dogs begins by contacting breeders, handlers and judges who are knowledgeable about the breed. This will take time so the search must begin several months before the bitch comes in heat. In gathering information avoid using photos and advertisements. Most are flattering and are not forth coming about problems. Most usually promise more than a stud dog can produce. As a general rule, one should be cautious about those who recommend their own dogs because of they have a vested interest in the matter.

The list candidates must be screened, sorted and then reduced to a smaller group, usually to only the best 2 or 3. Experience teaches us that some will be better than others based on their appearance, quality of pedigree, health history, and offspring produced. Selecting the best one is usually difficult because information about each of them will not be equally available. Generally speaking, there are five reasons that explain why breeders select a particular stud dog. The five 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 no one of them can be used to assess and 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.

Once a list of 10 dogs has been developed, each dog should be checked against those traits and characteristics, which are considered to be important to the breeding. Some of the traits might be related to breed function such as 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 one that can reasonably be expected to compliment the strengths of the bitch and off set her faults or weaknesses.

Evaluating each stud dog 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 it is best to write down what is known about each pedigree in a summary statement. Compare them to 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 then the others. There will also be more information known about them and less about those used less often. In either case, as the facts are gathered and studied the original list of stud dogs will be shortened.

Seeing each of the final candidates first hand has no substitute. Visit their kennels and watch them at shows. Remember that the skillful handling of dogs 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 that has been collected.

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

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 or ancestors identified in a three generation pedigree.
4. Number of pups produced with desired traits.

When all of the information from the checklist has been considered and taken together as a composite, a reasonable projection can be made about the potential value of each stud dog. 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 these traits. They should be removed from the list or placed near the bottom.

If Mendel were asked to suggest an approach he would have begun 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 hypothetical candidates that were considered in a search for the best stud dog for a hypothetical bitch. At home breeders should develop a list the defects and traits considered important to their 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	4/6	4/6	6/6	6/6
2. Ch Nestle Quick	NT	NT	OFA	NT	I	2/9	4/9	2/9	5/9	6/9
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	3/4	3/4	4/4
5. Ch Holly Top	Clear	Clear	NT	Clear	C	7/9	6/9	6/9	7/9	9/9
6. Van Joner's Que	Clear	Clear	OFA	NT	C	4/9	4/9	8/9	7/9	7/9
7. Ch VanCleves Asa	Clear	Clear	OFA	Clear	C	8/10	7/10	8/10	9/10	10/10
8. Ch Slade Rimee	NT	NT	OFA	M	C	7/9	9/9	4/9	3/9	6/9
9. Ch Fryer We Not	NT	NC	NT	NT	I	1/9	2/9	1/9	3/9	3/9
10. Hope Well Bee	M	NT	NC	Clear	C	2/5	5/5	3/5	4/5	3/5

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 scored well on five of the six important breed traits. They also ranked highest for having the best ratios of offspring that meet desired breed characteristics. (6 out of 9 etc.). 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 3 of 4 with correct top lines, coat and feet. But his health history 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 deliberated process. Temperament should not be overlooked in this process.

The number of DNA tests that can be used for screening increases each year thanks to the efforts of the AKC Canine Health Foundation. DNA testing of sires, dams and offspring takes doubt out of the screening and selection process. By using these tests the time needed to breed out health problems can be significantly reduced. Some owners do not believe in testing their stud dogs on the grounds that it is too costly or that 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 time and money on unnecessary tests. 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.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carmelo 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 the promotion of breeding better dogs. He has also has written many articles and several books and the subject.

Dr. Battaglia is also a popular TV and radio talk show speaker and has appeared on Animal Planet several times. His seminars on breeding dogs, selecting sires and choosing puppies have been well received by the breed clubs throughout the US and Canada. Those interested in learning more about his seminars should contact him directly at visit his website at <http://www.breedingbetterdogs.com>