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Well-bred or well pedigreed?

The rightful "pit dog".

By Trotter.

Just blows my mind ... do you see the detail?

Can you follow it?

Well-bred or well pedigreed? **That is the question.**

{Also see "The spotless pedigree myth" article in this file on this website.}

Evaluating dams and sires to determine their contributions to the breed's gene pool is based on separating the effective breeding population of those who really produce from the general breeding population of those that merely have puppies.

Sometimes this is difficult to do because of the important factor of progeny opportunity.

In studying thoroughbred horses and the history of Calumet Farm, it was interesting to realize the fantastic producing and racing record enjoyed under the guidance of farm advisor/trainer Ben Jones and the decline it suffered following his loss.

Expert bloodstock people were not absolutely sure if the producing line itself weakened or if its effectiveness was greatly reduced because Jones was no longer the trainer / manager.

The greatest of producers must be in a position for their progeny to have the proper opportunity for success in order for these dams and sires to receive their just place in producing annals.

Master breeders are able to effect a favorable outcome to ensure the best of opportunities for their producers.

It is not a coincidence that these extraordinary producers were in the hands of expert breeders who knew how to best utilize the gene pools.

Because dogs were honest, sound, hard-working specimens in the formative days of working dog showing, breeders had the luxury of decision making aimed at creating more stylish and esthetically pleasing animals.

First realize breeding for top working dogs is not the same as breeding for top show conformation or non-show - working dogs. – {*Stone me but the truth is the truth – and your client need perfection either way they ask your dog to be ... that's why it is so important to know exactly what your clients intention would be for the dog they plan to have. MK.*}
{*Then also realize breeding for functionality and breeding for perfect show conformation not the same thing – MK*}

The last decades of the twentieth century proved, that the pendulum can swing too far in that direction and dogs can begin to lose **true functionality.**

Recent thinking among world-class dog people factors in this loss, and there has been a renaissance of emphasis **on the form and function equation.**

Such concentration on overall correctness results in dogs that are not only look good **but also are proper and able to function appropriately for their breed.** *{I could not agree more ... the APBT is after all one breed and no difference should be between show and other working disciplines but not at the expense of functionality - MK}*

Profiling a pedigree.

When you look at the animal's pedigree, it tells you what he ought to be.

When you look at an animal performing in an event, it tells you what he seems to be.

When you look at his offspring and producing record, it tells you what he is!

The pedigree is the family tree of the animal, but it is not absolute proof that the bearer of the pedigree has the hoped-for genetic makeup that his pedigree might promise.

It is impossible to know ... which of those great dogs in the pedigree are the ones whose genes actually ended up in the final product.

Perhaps the two or three weak areas in the pedigree **are the ones with the most impact on a particular animal.**

Because an ancestor is present more than once **does not mean** that you can depend on a particular trait of that ancestor's appearing in later generations.

A trait is either present or it's not, depending on its dominance or recessiveness and what was copied from each side of the pedigree.

Pedigrees—genetic blueprints - have an honorable history dating back to ancient clay tablets in Babylonia more than 6,000 years ago.

These ancient artifacts were pedigrees of horses, indicating traits thought to be inherited. It's interesting to note that the Talmud contains ancient Hebrew laws that seem to recognize that hemophilia was not only inherited but also carried by the mother, as it warned against circumcision of later sons if earlier ones had been lost. {See article discussion on the "Importance of the Dam" under "Breeders consider this" and sub article under "Styles of breeding" on this website}. However, horse breeders remain the ones to whom we are indebted for early efforts at keeping pedigrees.

Like the sagas of the Vikings, early pedigrees were passed along by word of mouth. (I have obtained breeding stock with handwritten pedigrees – accepted at that time).

Horse traders memorized them to improve their sales pitches as they practiced their trade. *{This still happen today – then also because a "some" breeder knows every dog's history as well within the pedigree – then even more so because of the intendent and written word - MK.}*

Authenticity was added to the practice of keeping pedigrees once they were put on paper.

When stud books maintained by breed registries came into use to verify pedigrees, they gained even more credibility.

The Foxhound people (also the "Bull & Terrier breeders) claim to be the first among dog fanciers to keep true registries and pedigrees, and this claim is valid based both on the records of the dogs and on the fact that they were already in the habit of keeping the records of their horses.

Pedigree analysis.

The study of a pedigree is an attempt to make order out of what could be termed disorder.

A pedigree recognizes the genetic fact that every living thing is the sum of all of its collective ancestors—for better or for worse. Some pedigree analysts believe that each generation reshuffles all of the genes from previous generations. Aside from the prominent names and achievements of the ancestors, the pedigree has hidden within it the character of the sum total of the prior generations. Although the animal always inherits the same number of characteristics from each parent, it does not inherit the same quality of individual characteristics. To further complicate the pedigree picture, the genius thoroughbred breeder *Federico Tesio* believed in the independence of inherited characteristics.

A pedigree of just names—no matter how famous—**is of little value until you learn to put traits, both good and bad, with those individual names**. Therefore, the annotated pedigree, which gives much more information on each animal, is of great value.

The first requirement of the pedigree is to contain four, preferably five, generations of the names of the individual ancestors.

The next requirement of the pedigree is an indication of the performance records of the animals.

The ultimate pedigree has traits and characteristics, both good and bad, as well as producing information and advice.

The in-depth analysis of a pedigree will be both quantitative and qualitative.

In the first instance, it is to recognize that a name occurring over and over in a pedigree may have more weight than a closer name that only appears once. This is in accordance with the aforementioned Galton's Law.

In the second case, it is to recognize that the name of a great sire and/or dam that appears a number of times in the pedigree **does not mean that each contribution of that particular animal is the same.**

In fact, even pre-potent sires and dams have a wide range of characteristics and aptitudes that can be contributed to ensuing generations.

Remember that good dogs and those who are not so good can and do come from the same pedigrees.

That is why I worry about mediocre dogs from well-bred pedigrees.

When later pedigree scholars study extended pedigrees and see the name of a poor brother to a great dog, they may think that they have a better ancestor than they do.

Based on paper, they give more value to the dog whose pedigree they are studying than the dog deserves.

In the 1960s there was a lady who had the most incredible ability to recite pedigrees. She could rattle off the names of sires and dams dating back into the 1800s.

Yes, she really knew some names.

What she did not know was what the dogs were like—even a generation or two back.

Reciting information and being able to understand it and apply it are two different things.

Knowing names in pedigrees is all well and good, but it has little value if you have no knowledge of the characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of the individual animals and their families.

Know what each name represents.

Once you have that valuable information, you are ready to proceed.

The purpose of studying pedigrees is to assist you in getting the classic names in proper order into your pedigrees as often as possible.

Such study is designed to help concentrate the best possible genes in the end product.

The pedigree helps give direction to the search for valuable traits, resulting in a product that breeds true.

This requires a working knowledge of the individuals in the pedigree for at least four or five generations.

The more one knows about the qualities and the limitations of the animals, the more likely one is to improve on the pedigree of the next generation.

That is why you should use great caution when using animals whose other family members you know nothing about. When you make a decision to import an animal for breeding purposes, make sure you have in-depth knowledge of animals in the dog's pedigree as well as the dog's brothers, sisters, cousins, and other relatives.

Here are some ways to brainstorm a pedigree:

- Prepare a synopsis of the qualities of the individual whose pedigree it is.

Acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses.

- Do the same thing with very close ancestors.

The closer the ancestor, the more in-depth information you should try to get.

Give more credit to an outstanding sire and dam than to an outstanding great-grandsire.

- Try to determine the heritability of traits with close ancestors. Make lists of pluses and minuses of these individuals.
- Take a hard look at siblings of the individual to assess how they resemble him or her.
- Try to get some producing records on the tail female line and the tail male line.
- Consider the degree of inbreeding, linebreeding, and/or close breeding in the pedigree.
- Study the pedigrees of prospective mates for the individual you have in mind.
- Seek out progeny of other breeding's that are similar to the one you are considering to see how they turned out. If a half-sister of your bitch was bred to the same dog, what were the progeny like?
- Ask yourself, "Does the pedigree seem balanced and does it feel right?"

Sometimes this balance is achieved by putting brothers and sisters into the same slot on both the top side and the bottom side of the pedigree. Sometimes it is achieved by complementary proportions of inbreeding and linebreeding; sometimes it is achieved by complementary proportions of sound, honest animals; and sometimes the ultimate in balance is achieved when the great producers in the breed relate to each other in balanced genetic combinations that they return to the progeny through both the sire and the dam.

Such pedigree credentials would seem impeccable, but still your common sense (*with Maurice Caver it was said he had the ability to see a dog and knew – also called the art of breeding*) will be your most valuable asset in reading a pedigree, just as it is with everything else associated with breeding. You should be able to work with your pedigrees so that you develop a degree of predictability as to what can be expected in characteristics. The important thing is to aim for and accept is a degree of predictability, because no one, at least for now, can predict for sure what the product of any proposed pedigree will be.

In responding to the fact that people feel unjustly secure when they consider the study of mathematics as exact, *Dr. Albert Einstein* said: "Concepts can only acquire content when they are connected, however, indirectly, to experience.

"Use experienced and knowledgeable people in your breed to help expand your pedigree research. (For that I thank my mentor Chis Bekker and various other doggers – a man can't live alone on an island. MK).

An important element for the astute dog breeder to consider when evaluating pedigrees for a long-term breeding program is if the animal will fit well with those already in the line as well as the pedigrees of the future.

Sometimes this determination is not possible *until after the animal has gone on to Valhalla – {normally the case MK.}*

The animal in mind is one that acts like connective tissue, pulling the pedigree together, so to speak. It might be said that this dog's genetic ingredients mixed well with other pedigrees.

Sometimes an animal is so extreme that it is unable to become a productive component in the pedigree of the next generation.

Using this animal in your breeding program would have only short-term benefits, at best.

Breeders who attempt to duplicate the pedigree of a great dog with a breeding that appears to be identical are more often than not disappointed in the results. Just because all of the names in the third generation are alike or very similar does not mean that the same individual genetic messages were sent down through those ensuing generations.

The fact that by actually duplicate the pedigree of a great one (as is done with repeat breeding's) only to get different results because the genetic messages sent on by the very same players were different.

When the best individuals in your pedigrees are getting further and further back in them, an infusion of new blood from outstanding gene pools is absolutely necessary.

Do not allow a wasting away of your line just to keep “home/family bred line in it.”

Unfortunately, the unlimited number of potential genetic combinations that can result from the bringing together of two pedigrees means that you do not know until the mating if the results will be favorable, unfavorable, or a combination of both.

That is why profiling pedigrees can be such a valuable tool to you. It assists you in making the important decisions in weeding your genetic garden.

Now to the big question...

Well-bred or well pedigreed?

What is the exact meaning of the term “well bred”?

Is a dog well-bred if it comes from well-bred stock or has a quality pedigree?

If so, why are there so many mediocre dogs with good pedigree credentials?

Is it possible that some dogs that appear well bred are not?

Is it possible that instead of being well bred, they are simply “well pedigreed”?

Consider the royal families of Europe, who were all of well-bred stock. Some of the gifted monarchs resulting from these gene pools did indeed live up to their splendid blue blood. But others were miserably incompetent and totally unable to live up to their pedigrees because they had not inherited the best genes from their ancestors.

Unfortunately, by inheriting the worst genes present in their ancestors, they were now dangerous to society as “perceived royals”— expected to provide civilized leadership but unable to deliver.

Just like the disappointing dog who appears to be well bred with a quality pedigree, they did not truly represent their classic families.

To determine if a dog is truly well bred as opposed to simply well pedigreed is a fascinating challenge. When we look at a pedigree, we are all optimists who assume that the great ones contributed the best that was in them through each generation.

This is true even though we know intellectually that each dog has a wide and varied range of genetic material, not all of which is desirable, to pass on to successive generations.

Sometimes the genes **just don't** behave the way you want them to.

So instead of receiving the best of all those marvelous dogs, the end product got the worst of them!

It can and do happen, and it doesn't mean that the dog would flunk a DNA verification test. Unfortunately, no family of dogs is totally free of erratic genetic behavior to my knowledge.

Therefore, even the product of a well-bred pedigree must be carefully evaluated before that dog is allowed to become part of the gene pool of future generations.

For some and then some more than others (in countries than banned the testing of their breeding dogs or offspring) it is a numbers game and a gamble ... for those keen breeders breeding with a honorable set code of ethics, a burning passion for this breed but also with an open mind and attitude of learning.

Then the only option left for such breeders is to breed with the best of the best – those dogs that produced them and or their direct offspring. (For those I lift my hat MK.)

It is my personal belief that a poor or rather mediocre dog from a well-bred pedigree can be more dangerous to the breed **than** a mediocre dog from a mediocre pedigree. At least the latter's paperwork doesn't imply false promises that later seduce breeders into putting this animal into their gene pools.

When casual young breeders stud an apparently excellent pedigree, they get a false sense of security due to respected names from the past. If they are unable to determine that many of the names leading back to the famous ones are of little worth, they proceed with good intentions based on blind faith.

It is even possible to get poor specimens even if the names leading to the famous ones represented dogs of good quality.

This is due to the lottery-like odds of genetic behavior.

To determine if a dog is well bred, ask yourself **if he represents the quality dogs that appear in the pedigree.**

Is he very much like them?

If he differs greatly from the outstanding dogs of his excellent pedigree, this dog himself might not be all that well bred, **regardless** of how the pedigree reads.

Littermates that are also representative of the excellent pedigree provide proof that the genetic combination was compatible and relatively free from hidden undesirable genes.

Even the shortcomings of the animals being evaluated should be similar to those one would expect from this pedigree, **not** something out of the blue, which would indicate very erratic genetic behavior.

In other words, the siblings **should** truly represent their well-bred pedigree with minor variations within the range of the pedigree's previous performances.

If the breeding dog or dog's siblings meet these requirements, does it mean the dog is well bred? Maybe.

We will not know that answer until the dog is actually progeny-tested. If we see that the breeding dogs passes on those desired characteristics reflected both in their pedigree and in the dogs person we can assess the dog as being well bred and not just well pedigreed.

The message is to avoid using mediocre dogs in your breeding program just because they appear to be well bred.

Remember that when a pedigree that produces mediocre dogs is built on good dogs, the mediocre animal is not just the opposite of what the breeder had in mind but is also the opposite of the pedigree itself! If only one really good dog results from a well-bred pedigree, consider proceeding with that one dog and neutering the rest.

Final thoughts.

Breeding quality dogs is not an easy task for any breeder.

To dedicate your life to your breed means to use all of the tools available to the best of your ability so that only the strongest links are put into the chain of the gene pool.

This expertise must be applied at every level of the breeding program, from the selection of the brood bitch to the choice of the best sire to use on her.

The determination of which resulting puppies, if any, to return to the gene pool in the future **is the next vital step.**

Breeders with mediocre stock who become comfortable simply breeding what they have and keeping whatever they get to show put themselves and their breeds in jeopardy.

Without continuing serious and objective evaluation of the quality of the animals involved, true success becomes very elusive.

The truly outstanding breeders are those whose success is based on knowing what stock to retain as well as knowing when that stock needs outside rejuvenation. (See related *"Styles of breeding"* under the file *"The breeder and his breeding's"* on this website- MK)

I just love and agree with that song **"The Gambler"** from Kenny Rodgers – it only make sense.
{Also see article about culling under the file *"Breeder and his breeding's"* on this website – MK.}