



Generally Speaking

Well it seemed that everyone we spoke to in the days preceding the broadcasting of the BBC's widely publicised Pedigree Dogs Exposed planned to watch it, as it covered such an important topic - **are the majority of dog breeders REALLY heartless, irresponsible, or even guilty of downright neglect of the dogs in their care?** From the reports coming out of Britain after the screening of the programme it did seem that these "breeders" must be in the majority, although that did not reflect the situation as we saw it - at least in this country.

No-one in their right mind could have failed to be deeply distressed by the footage of dogs suffering so terribly, although as it went on, and often replaying the same footage or nearly the same footage of a few poor dogs of the same breeds being filmed in their distress, it did appear to be a very "targeted" report -and the target was narrow..

Be that as it may, it was - as ANKC Chairman Hugh Gent attempted to point out in the very obviously edited interview conducted with him that subsequently went to air - a wake up call to all concerned that increasing emphasis must be placed on the breeding of dogs (purebred or designer "bred") with the objective of producing the most healthy, sane and sound animals of which we are capable. In the words of the Kennel Club, London, **Dogs that are Fit for Function, Fit for Life!**

In breeds where there are known problems of inherited disease, and tests exist, surely it is totally irresponsible to avoid having them done? Cost is a big problem and a huge deterrent, but somehow it has to be faced or funded if the fancy as a whole is to retain credibility.

However, the interesting thing to us is that **SINCE** the programme and follow up interviews, dogs in general and purebreds in particular have received **more POSITIVE publicity** than we can ever recall. Almost daily since the airing, there has been a good news story on air, on TV, or in print. The focus appears to be strongly slanted towards dogs, and the benefits of owning them, and this is conveyed in a positive not a negative sense.

The article on page 8 of this issue **A Geneticist's Best Friend: Dogs** is but one of many we came across recently reflecting the importance - and the recognition - of the role of the dog in our lives. There is on the other hand, another great article in this issue, on page 23 **Omerta - The Code of Silence** which warns all too clearly of the dangers of ignoring the steadily increasing health risks encountered these days in dogs.

So while casting around for what to say about the programme, the topic of course came up in a conversation with Mr Frank Pieterse, President, Dogs NSW and he kindly allowed me to print the following in its entirety. Meanwhile we also have an unexpected new Code of Practice in NSW which takes some digesting, (see Letter from the Minister for Primary Industries on page 10) and the RSPCA has put out a very good puppy booklet to guide potential buyers and basically to head them in the direction of purebred breeders who are members of Controlling Bodies.

WENDYE SLATYER Editor

PEDIGREE DOGS EXPOSED.

DID WE SEE THE WHOLE STORY?

The BBC Pedigree Dogs Exposed programme screened by the ABC on 10 September and the Catalyst Program, an Australian Version of PDE, shown one week later featured numerous emotive anecdotes and opinions highly critical of purebred dogs. However, little effort was made to enlighten the viewer about the extensive health initiatives of dog governing bodies and responsible breeders around the world including, in Australia, many years work on issues such as hips and elbows, ACES specialist eye testing and the eradication of Copper toxicosis in Bedlington Terriers, to name a few.

Also in short supply was scientific statistical research as to the incidence in breeds of conditions that were inferred to be prevalent among purebred dogs. Breeders were given little right of reply.

The main attacks on purebred dogs centered on health problems allegedly caused by two practices, **"in breeding"** and **"breeding to Standards"**.

PDE, in particular, made much of the disease "syringomyelia", (CM/SM) in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels (and some other breeds), but did not indicate how this disease is related to the Breed Standards or that it can only be diagnosed by highly expensive MRI tests not just a visit to the local vet. They did not say that even specialist neurologists can disagree on interpreting the MRIs or that the majority of dogs with CM/SM have no symptoms. They did not say that responsible breeders now use the Breeding Protocol which was created through the research of UK Veterinary neurologist Dr Clare Rusbridge or mention the substantial fund raising support by breeders around the world to finance the search for a gene marker for CM/SM.

Where were the statistics about the degrees and alleged effects of inbreeding, particularly in Australia, and where were the comparable statistics about health issues in mixed breed dogs?

One can perhaps learn something from media programmes raising potential health issues based on anecdotes and opinions. However the sweeping insinuations against purebred dogs and the integrity of responsible breeders as a whole were, in the writer's view, neither substantiated nor justified.

Nevertheless, the programme does make the case that the issue of exaggeration needs to be urgently addressed by both breeders and judges.

Indeed, if we are going to rely on anecdotal evidence, we can ask any groomer about the percentages of dogs that they see with non functional mouths or back legs, and/or other health problems including unreliable temperaments. They will tell you the crossbreds predominate! Again, anecdotally, how often whether at shows, visiting kennels or in the community at large, does one see an obviously sick purebred dog?

What should be said is that responsible breeders would embrace any credible scientific and statistical evidence as to dog related health issues and utilise such evidence to its best advantage for the benefit of their dogs. We at Dogs NSW support and look forward to such scientifically based conclusions as may result from the proposed UK inquiry into health issues and indeed, any other credible research and statistical initiatives to improve the health of all dogs. We fully support the programme recently commenced by Professor Frank Nicholas and his team at Sydney University.

Nevertheless, these programmes are a salutary reminder that if we don't tell people what we do for the health of our dogs it is unlikely that anyone else will.

FRANK PIETERSE, PRESIDENT DOGS NSW



(Above) Melbourne Royal Best In Show
Shetland Sheepdog - Gr Ch & Can Ch
GRANDGABLES HOME TOWN HERO (imp USA)
(right) Perth Royal Best In Show
Gr Ch Cordmaker Topsy Turvey

See our usual stunning pictorial major events coverage next month

