

Breeding Dogs in the 21st Century

Today's dog breeder faces more obstacles than ever before.

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Today's dog breeder faces more obstacles to developing a successful producing line than ever before. Granted, advances in genetic research and health issues assist us toward eliminating problems that once stumped the generations that preceded us. However, in order to implement these advances we have to have living, breathing dogs on the ground, and this is where a good part of today's problem lies.

The high cost of real estate and restrictive zoning laws combined with the unceasing work of the so-called animal rights groupsthose who insist they advocate in the best interests of dogsreduce our breeding stock population down to its barest minimum. The large breeding kennels of the past are all but nonexistent today.

We, too, impose sanctions on ourselves. What would the reaction be today if in fact there were a return of the large breeding kennels of the past? I fear that if the very individuals who occupy chapters of praise in our breed books because of their contributions were to return today, they would be branded "puppy mills." Since we are no longer afforded the luxury of large breeding operations we've somehow managed to stigmatize the few that do.

In days gone by when the large kennels were able to house great numbers of dogs, a single failure really didn't represent a great loss, in that there were other combinations and other plans that could quickly be resorted to without losing a great deal of time or progress. Those revered breeders of old helped breeds take great strides along their developmental paths. We enjoy the fruits of their contributions to this day.

The Win's the ThingAnother obstacle we've imposed upon ourselves comes by way of our obsession with the record-makers. Practically every mega-winner that passes through that brief window of fame becomes the sought-after sire of the hourall too often at a disadvantage to both individuals involved in the mating. Wins have little or nothing to do with producing ability. There is an underlying assumption that if a dog is good enough to acquire an impressive show record, it will be reflected in the quality of his offspring. Bred to the right bitches from the right bloodlines a winning dog may sire winners, but the ability to produce has nothing to do with the number of wins the dog has acquired.

As odd as it may appear to some, there are some sires whose offspring are less apt to be great winners than they are great producers. But if one's only intent is to produce next season's winners, producing ability doesn't even enter into the equation.

I'm sure my harping on days gone by may come as a source of irritation to those who see themselves as a part of the "modern" dog game. That may well be the case, but I clearly remember breeders I knew referring to particular matings as "step breedings." That is, they were making a breeding to produce the individual that they then would take to a particular line or dog to accomplish what they were after.