

Editor's Page

Action Wins Over Reaction

by Christi McDonald

For the past few months DR has devoted space to a topic that pertains specifically to Dalmatians, but which has implications that could affect fanciers in any AKC breed. Someone pointed out to me that many readers might have skipped over those pages, thinking that a story about Dalmatians would be of no interest to them. If this is true, it is my failure as editor to draw the attention of everyone to those articles and letters, because they are representative of issues that are going to confront us in purebred dogs more and more often in today's world.

I mention this in part because I hope anyone who missed these items, in the 2009 Annual and in "Letters" in February and March, will go back and read them. You can also find a link to the article and related letters online at www.dogsinreview.com. The Dal situation raises crucial questions for all dog people: How far must breeders be willing to go to ensure the future health of their breed? If a parent club is not willing to do what knowledgeable breeders believe is in the best interest of a breed, what actions are open to those breeders? In the same scenario, at what point is the American Kennel Club obligated to become involved, if ever? Are the AKC and its member clubs living up to the promise of its mission statement and core values to "advance canine health and well-being" and "protect the health and well-being of all dogs"?

I was frankly saddened and distressed to recently learn that three members of the Dalmatian Club of America Board of Governors resigned their Board positions. All three have devoted many years of service to their breed. Then came the full resignation of Dr. Susanne Hughes, DCA Veterinary Liaison for approximately 20 years. The resignations of Dr. Irv Krukenkamp, MaryLynn Jensen, Ph.D., Ken Berg and Dr. Hughes all involved inaction on the part of the DCA to protect the health of the breed. This isn't a tiff among club members — it is a serious matter that carries consequences beyond just this breed. In my opinion it is a shame that the parent club did not take responsible action on this prior to these resignations, because things cannot always be mended once broken. These Dal fanciers have lost hope, but it is their breed that is losing in the long run.

Speaking of action vs. reaction, following the BBC television program last August targeting the health of purebred dogs, the Kennel Club in England was forced to react to serious allegations. Critics now argue (at least in the American dog press) that the KC went overboard: it began to review all breed standards and make revisions where necessary, so "extreme" characteristics that might negatively impact breed health are discouraged; it ruled that if, in the opinion of a show manager, secretary or judge at a show, a dog is thought to be suffering from physical limitations based on conformation, the dog can be excluded from competition; and it determined that going forward breeders may no longer register offspring from father/daughter, mother/son or full brother/sister breedings "except under exceptional circumstances when special permission would be required."

Overreaction? Possibly. Is overreaction preferable to no action? One would think. What we want is what is best for our dogs, and to continue to breed and show dogs. If we are forewarned of the potential for an attack on our sport, isn't it prudent to get out a message to the public that we as breeders are as concerned as anyone — indeed, more concerned — about the health of our dogs? Why not collect the data that proves this and build a campaign to show the public how serious we are about the health of purebred dogs? We should broadcast at every opportunity figures that show how much time and money goes into testing and screening for genetic disorders, how many parent clubs have active health committees and foundations, how much funding goes to research, and how many diseases and disorders are becoming unheard of in some breeds thanks to research and testing.

Action is so far preferable to reaction.

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