

Dalmatians at a Crossroads

Dalmatian breeders weigh in on health controversy.

A Dalmatian down from the Dalmatian/Pointer "backcross" more than 30 years ago; Aberdeen's Deal or No Deal, breeder-handled by Denise Powell, was recently Best of Winners at the UKC National Specialty.
Photo Courtesy Irv Krukenkamp, M.D.

Dogs in Review recently received a letter from a Dalmatian breeder and parent club member regarding a health issue in his breed. After further investigation and receipt of a second letter, from the president of the UKC Dalmatian club, DR invited the Dalmatian Club of America to weigh in as well. In light of the recent controversy in the U.K. regarding the health of purebred dogs, DR attempts to shed more light on this debate.
– Christi McDonald

Dear Bo,
A recent announcement of a DNA test for High Uric Acid in Dalmatians and other breeds has received quite a bit of attention in the press. The press release was published in Veterinary Practice News and the development has been covered in The New York Times, U.S. News and World Report, Forbes, and many other places.

High Uric Acid (HUA) is a predisposing condition for Urate Stone Disease in the bladder, which can be life threatening, may require surgical intervention, and too frequently results in a decision to euthanize. The gene for HUA exists in many breeds, but in Dalmatians it is endemic – meaning that all AKC Dalmatians have HUA. There was a "backcross" to a champion Pointer over 30 years ago that resulted in a line of Dalmatians predominantly free of the HUA gene, like other breeds. It has now been 12 generations since the original backcross, and the proponents of the effort, almost all members of the Dalmatian Club of America, have bred successive generations back to selected champion AKC Dals and maintained the gene for "normal" uric acid. Many of these dogs are very beautiful and in our expert opinion could easily complete an AKC championship. The group of "normal uric acid" breeders includes at least one M.D., several Ph.D.s, veterinarians, successful show breeders of long standing, AKC judges, and others.

Please bring to the fuller attention of the dog world that these "healthy" Dalmatians do indeed exist. AKC and the DCA have steadfastly refused to consider registration for these Dals with one individual from a breed with a similar phenotype in the 12th generation, as being "not purebred enough." A recent vote by the DCA, after a contentious online debate, upheld a 25-year-old prohibition of even discussing registration of these dogs. And AKC, in spite of their recent announcement about their concern for health, seems content to leave these matters entirely in the hands of the parent breed clubs, which can be highly political. AKC has for many years, when asked about breed health, said "we are only a registry."

This is not unrelated to criticism of breeders and institutions you mentioned, from the BBC documentary leveled at the British Kennel Club and soon to be directed toward our continent. In fact it is right on target for what the documentarian is talking about.

Ron Zimmerman
Member of the Dalmatian Club of America

Dear Ms. McDonald,

I understand that your magazine is interested in Low Uric Acid, or Normal Uric Acid, Dalmatians. It has become quite a controversy between the Dalmatian Club of America and supporters of the Normal Uric Acid dog breeders. Why would a club be against improving the health of their breed? Why would a club vote to exclude Normal Uric Acid dogs from being AKC registered for 30 years? Why is no protocol for AKC inclusion being developed by the AKC parent club? Research from University of California Davis Veterinary School has identified the gene responsible for high uric acid bladder stone disease in Dalmatians (and several other breeds as well) but the DCA feels that nothing needs to be done with the information but studies of it – which has already been done since 1974.



Maybe you can get some answers. I am in need of answers also. Our whole breed is in need of answers.

Please check out some websites, including DalmatianHeritage.com, www.geocities.com/fiacredals, for pictures and more information.

Good luck,
Carol Chase
Fiacre Dalmatians
President , Dalmatians of North America (UKC)

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