

The Dalmatian Issue

DCA governors and members rebut statement from president.

To the Editor:

In response to your recent article "Dalmatians at a Crossroads" (DR 2009 Annual), I am writing as a clinician (cardiothoracic surgeon), as a scientist (NIH funded researcher), and as immediate past Chairman of the Dalmatian Club of America Health and Research Committee.

In my opinion both the DCA and the AKC share equal responsibility for taking their "eye off the ball" when presented with a significant opportunity to improve the health and well being of the Dalmatian. In so doing a classic catch-22 stalemate has been produced: the parent club refuses to acknowledge the clear health benefit of recognizing normal uric acid-producing Dalmatians and demands further "testing," and the AKC will not register these dogs until approved by the parent club. The further development of this breeding program is irresolvably impeded by the inability to exhibit the dogs and to evaluate their merit against the gold standard, namely the AKC Dalmatian breed standard.

A few facts are incontrovertible: 1) After 35 years of development and more than 13 generations of pure breeding to AKC-registered Dalmatians, there are over 10,000 Dalmatians in the current pedigrees of Normal Uric Acid (NUA) Dalmatians; 2) NUA Dalmatians are proven by both pedigree and parentage analysis to be 99.98 percent Dalmatian; 3) forensic DNA analysis has demonstrated over 99.8 percent homology between NUA Dalmatians and AKC-registered Dalmatians. NUA Dalmatians are Dalmatians, end of story.

Regardless of the machinations of the parent club or of the AKC, the scientific facts clearly demonstrate that NUA Dalmatians exceed by far any criteria of any registry anywhere in the world to be registered as purebred Dalmatians! In my opinion the DCA and the AKC should immediately provide for registration of the NUA Dalmatians, which would permit the further development of these breeding lines and improve the overall health of the breed. To not do so is an abdication of their respective leadership roles in the sport of purebred dogs and allows the continuation of a major health defect in the breed that can be eradicated, and now! That defect leads to hundreds of Dalmatians suffering from urinary obstruction each year, and at a cost of \$6 to \$10 million dollars borne by the pet-owning-public annually.

Irvin B. Krukenkamp, MD

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to your article "Dalmatians at a Crossroads" that appeared in the DR 2009 Annual issue. We are submitting this response as individual Dalmatian owners, exhibitors and breeders, but have the vantage point of following the project from its inception. In addition, we have both served repeated elected terms on the Board of Governors of the Dalmatian Club of America; have been officers of the club, presidents of the DCA Foundation, and Chairs of the parent club Health and Research Committee.

We believe that the AKC was remiss in 1984 by acquiescing to a vote of the DCA membership to place "on hold" the registrations that were granted to two fifth-generation progeny that resulted from the initial and only cross between a Dalmatian and a Pointer. AKC originally granted these registrations at the request of the DCA Board and considered the dogs to be purebred and thereby worthy of unrestricted registration.

Now, eight generations later with continued breeding only to AKC-registered Dalmatians, the current progeny are certainly even more worthy of registration.

We believe that the descendants of the backcross should receive full AKC registration for the following reasons:

Improving the health of the Dalmatian and purebred dogs in general is one of the primary purposes of the DCA and the AKC. The available evidence indicates that the introduction of the transporter gene that results in low (canine normal) uric acid reduces (or eliminates) the formation of urate crystals, urate aggregates and urate stones in the Dalmatian breed. As a result there is a reduction in urinary tract obstructive syndromes (afflicting predominantly male Dalmatians) that significantly improves the health and well-being of the breed, reduces pain and suffering in the dog, decreases stress and worry by the owner, and saves owners millions of dollars annually.

The current descendants of the original cross are truly Dalmatians in appearance, temperament and type, and are representative of the breed. They are indistinguishable from any cross-section of conformation and non-show Dalmatians that could be observed throughout the country.

The current descendants of the original cross are purebred Dalmatians based upon DNA analysis. Additionally, the fifth-generation bitch that was used to carry the line forward was, in fact, registered by AKC as a Dalmatian.

Pedigree analysis of the 12th generation from the original cross indicates that the single champion Pointer in the pedigree represents less than 0.02 percent of the genetic background of the current Dalmatian. The current descendants do not exhibit any phenotypic Pointer characteristics, nor do they exhibit any unusual, non-typical Dalmatian health issues.

The bottom line is that these dogs ARE Dalmatians by any standard of measurement and therefore deserve to have full AKC registration.

There is a wealth of information and background available, and all who are interested are encouraged to review the information, photographs and video available on the DCA LUA website.

Sincerely,
Kenneth and Eva Berg
Moraga, Calif.

Dear Editor,

A great many of the opponents of the Normal Uric Acid Dalmatians (NUA) have missed the point of the introduction of the NUA gene and have a lack of basic scientific understanding, which seems to be at the root of the lack of acceptance of these Dalmatians. Uric acid does not, on its own, cause urate stones. There is some triggering factor that causes some dogs to form stones, some to form sediment (basically very small stones) and some to form neither.

Researchers don't know currently what this factor is and may never know. But regardless of what the triggering factor is, whether it's genetic, environmental or some combination of both, without high levels of uric acid, urate stones cannot form.

Yes, it IS that simple. Does this mean that introducing the (NUA) gene is the answer to solving Dalmatian stone disease? No. Does it mean that is an answer? YES!

It is likely that other factors can also prevent the formation of urate stones, but at this time, other than management issues that may help some dogs (i.e. allopurinol, dietary management, surgical altering of the urinary tract), reducing the production of uric acid to a level comparable to that of all other breeds is the only one that has been scientifically proven.

Is lowering the level of uric acid in Dalmatians to "normal" the only answer? Of course not, but until such time as we have other solutions that may work better, it is the best option we have to reduce the incidence of Dalmatian stone disease.

Allowing NUA Dalmatians to be part of the AKC breeding pool will help the breed. Will it resolve the problem for all Dals? Not at this time. Because of the low number of NUA Dalmatians, the way that reputable breeders "guard" their bloodlines from backyard breeders/puppy mills, and because some breeders do not view this as a solution to the problem (or don't acknowledge that urate stone disease is a problem), it is likely that there will continue to be a pool of Dalmatians that will always remain HUA. But because this solution does not solve all problems does not mean we should not move forward with it.

As breeders we need to be allowed as many tools as possible to breed Dalmatians that are as healthy as possible. It is time for these undeniably Dalmatian dogs to be accepted into the AKC stud book.

Respectfully,
Mary-Lynn Jensen, Ph.D.
Woodwynd Dalmatians

Editor,

I would like to reply to Dr. Garvin's letter about the position of the Dalmatian Club of America with respect to the "Low" or

“Normal” Uric Acid backcross (“Dalmatians at a Crossroad,” DR 2009 Annual), noting that this is not just a breed-specific controversy, but goes to the heart of the criticism being leveled against the fancy for relegating concerns about breed health to low priority or secondary status. Dalmatians are a good case study in this respect, illustrating how breed clubs address health issues — or rather fail to.

It is no longer appropriate, and really never has been, for us to think of ourselves as “responsible breeders” because we do health clearances and support selected research efforts. We must go beyond that and think pro-actively about breed design, breed management and breed diversity — issues larger than our own breeding programs.

Fundamentally, Dr. Garvin says that the will of the parent club majority is being followed in this. And as indicated by the editor, AKC seems to think it is doing its job by leaving these matters entirely in the hands of the parent breed club. But do breed clubs routinely put health concerns first? I think not. We tend to forget that as a breed club we are actively designing a breed for a consumer who is not a voting member — the pet owner. AKC has a fundamental responsibility to exercise oversight in this area, which instead has been completely abdicated.

In his letter Dr. Garvin says the DCA voted against “re-opening discussion.” One must ask — why was discussion of such a matter disallowed in the first place? Oh, yes — the club voted 25 years ago to prohibit talking about the backcross, and then two years ago voted that it can be discussed as long as members don’t mention registration, or a path toward registration. And last year the club re-affirmed their opposition to allowing a discussion of registration including defining requirements. Is it ethical to suppress information, opinion and process in this manner? Many think not.

Rather than providing leadership or direction, Dr. Garvin and the DCA board of governors are placing the responsibility to prove the success of the backcross effort entirely on the shoulders of the few breeders willing to devote their limited resources to raising litters outside the auspices of AKC, and seem to demand a level of proof that would stagger a pharmaceutical company. Proof of what? This has not been answered in any authoritative fashion. Proponents are directed to do unspecified research to answer unspecified concerns, with an expectation that this would only lead to additional vague demands. The majority of the club seems comfortable not addressing this important health issue with a simple solution available, in the foreseeable future. Many deny it is a substantial concern and seem oblivious to their fellow club members and veterinarians who come forward and say urate stone disease is a serious problem in their experience.

Proponents of the backcross Dalmatians have largely come to think of dealing with DCA as an endless series of hoops to jump through, that calling for more studies and more research without defining the goal of that research is simply a way of kicking the can down the road. Many are tempted to resign from the club. One cannot escape the conclusion that DCA, and by extension, AKC, are not exhibiting an authentic commitment to the health of this particular breed.

Ron Zimmerman
Member of DCA

- More about Dalmatians at a Crossroads -