

More From the Other Side

More from DCA members against AKC recognition.

Dear Ms. McDonald,

I understand that you have signed a petition being circulated by proponents of the Pointer/Dalmatian backcross breeding program. As the editor of Dogs in Review, I am surprised that you would endorse this private breeding program, but I do recognize that the issue as presented by the backcross contingent could seem compelling. As is often the case, though, not all the facts are represented or represented accurately when a cause is being campaigned. From my perspective there are many reasons why this breeding program is not ready for AKC registration, but I hope three main facts may help balance the view of this issue.

1) All Dalmatians (that are AKC registered – Ed.) carry the high uric acid (HUA) gene and it is unique to the breed in the canine species. (Interestingly, this gene unique in the dog world is the same gene humans carry.) Even though all Dalmatians have it, only a small percentage of Dalmatians form stones. Although backcross proponents claim that as many as 30 percent do, analysis of objective data suggests that less than three percent do, and of those only a small percentage actually block. The truth of the matter is that there is no definitive study that answers the question regarding the rate of incidence. Whether it is three percent or 30 percent, the vast majority of Dalmatians do not form stones even though they all carry the HUA gene. This suggests that HUA alone is not the cause of urinary stone disease in Dalmatians. Research needs to be conducted to determine what is the cause or causes before a "cure" can be introduced.

2) Backcross dogs that carry the low uric acid (LUA) gene may not experience urate stone disease, but they do nothing for the vast majority of existing and future Dalmatians that do carry the HUA gene unique to the breed. (Backcross litters produce only about 50 percent LUA dogs.) This "solution" to the problem is not a solution unless all Dalmatians with HUA are culled, leaving only LUA dogs. Talk about limiting the gene pool!

3) The backcross program is a breeding program. It is not scientific research. It is not a program developed under or at the request of the parent club. Minimal records have been kept. Only two LUA to LUA breedings have been done. The issue was taken to the parent club membership twice in the past few years and originally some 30 years ago. Each time the membership rejected it because because it is a program that addresses a health issue that, while bad for those who endure it, is not a significant problem in the breed; because this is a private breeding program that is not well-founded in scientific research methodology; and because the participants refuse to do the necessary research to address real concerns of the majority of the membership. It is not because the membership does not care about the health of the breed.

Genetic alteration should be considered an extreme solution to an extreme problem. The AKC understands this and that is why their rules for opening the stud books exist. Have a look at them. Dalmatians have been uniquely Dalmatians for centuries and continue to be one of the healthiest breeds in existence. Given the limited incidence of this problem, the lack of effectiveness in this "solution" for the majority of the breed, and the lack of scientific work done, the membership made fully informed votes in the best interest of the breed.

Toni Linstedt
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Dear Christi –

Thanks for pulling my ad from the Non-Sporting issue. I still think it was inappropriate for you to have signed the Dalmatian petition, but I appreciate your insistence that we need to present the other side of the story. People have signed the petition without knowing the facts, and a number of them have expressed regret at doing so once they were made aware of what has actually transpired.

As far as I am concerned this is strictly a Dalmatian issue and I do not think the breed should be used as a poster child for canine health issues as you suggest. Although Dalmatians have deafness and uric acid related issues, they are actually a very healthy breed, rarely plagued by many of the health issues common in both purebred and mixed breed dogs. Despite what others would have you believe, urate crystals/stones are not a significant threat to this breed, are generally

manageable if they occur, are rarely life threatening, and many long-time breeder-owners have never owned a dog that developed a uric acid related problem of any kind. Although all Dalmatian supposedly have the potential, in actuality most of them will never have a problem. Because Shih Tzu have large eyes that could be scratched and Dachshunds and Corgis have long backs that can be injured, should we cross them with small eyed or short-backed breeds to prevent this from ever happening, meanwhile changing the breed? Although backcross Dalmatians have spot-like marking they do not have crisp, clear Dalmatian markings. Although DNA testing is used to identify the low uric acid pups in a backcross litter, they can also be visually identified by their spotting – after all these generations.

We knew that the pro-backcross group was sending letters to Dogs in Review, but there seemed little need to respond en masse. Dr. Garvin responded for the DCA and that should have been sufficient. (DCA President Dr. Charles Garvin responded to DR's request for comment on this issue. His response appeared in the 2009 DR Annual issue and on this website – Ed.) The backcross proponents were the ones who insisted that the DCA should vote on whether or not to pursue registration at this time. It was obvious to many of us that there were still far too many unanswered questions, but they were adamant that it was time to vote. Vote we did, and rather than garner the required two-thirds necessary for moving forward on the registration issue, the backcross group received less than half the votes. Several of them had stated that if DCA did not support registration of the backcross dogs at this time, they would take their dogs (and registration) elsewhere, but the battle over AKC registration rages on.

Many of the people who voted against AKC registration are in fact supportive of the project but think it is far too soon to consider registration. They would like to see some documented evidence that this will work as they have been told it will work. Is it so wrong to insist on evidence? Although the project has gone on for many years, there has been very little follow up on the resulting dogs. The dogs referred to as LUA/NUA or backcross dogs are all heterozygous animals, with the exception of one individual that has been kept hidden. Why is that? What does she look like? What happens when a spotted dog has two copies of the gene for LUA? Does it look like a Dalmatian or does it look like the first generation of the backcross? What actually happens when a homozygous LUA dog is bred to a purebred Dal? What happens when homozygous LUA dogs are bred together? At the very least we feel that those questions need to be answered. Although this project shows promise, it is nowhere near ready for prime time. Funding has been promised for additional research, and many individuals have pledged funds as well, but the pro-backcross group insists on registration NOW, without any additional answers.

Let's get some answers first and then discuss the possibility of registration for these dogs.

Sue MacMillan
Paisley Dalmatians since 1967

- More about Dalmatians at a Crossroads -