

## Walking the Tightrope

**Breeders integrate innumerable factors, risks, and beliefs to make their mark on a breed.**

*Amy Fernandez*

After breeding the Trotwood Miniature Pinschers for 35 years, Kathy Helming doesn't hesitate to attribute her success to both skill and luck. "Breeding is the art of matching the best of the best. It is an ongoing learning experience and I'm still learning!"

Whether you call it art, science, skill or luck, a great dog is the culmination of countless spot-on decisions, beginning with foundation stock. Unless these dogs possess superior type, balance, and proportion, instilling these essentials may require generations of work. Peter Belmont, breeder of the Elmo Afghan Hounds, concedes the importance of his earliest decisions. "I was selective about who I chose for my mentors. Joan McDonald Brearley of Sahadi, Sunny Shay of Grandeur, Anne Seranne and Barbara Wolferman of Mayfair Yorkies, Kay Finch of Crown Crest and Babbie Tongren of ben ghaZi all had a great influence on me. I give them full credit for the success I have the luxury of enjoying today."

A mentor's greatest contribution is often helping a novice cultivate an "eye for type," the ability to evaluate a dog's strengths and weaknesses while remaining mindful of the big picture. It's the cornerstone of every exceptional breeding decision, and successful breeders never stop looking, learning and honing this skill. After studying the breed and the standard, Belmont had a clear goal when he started breeding. He admits that it changed slightly as his understanding of the breed improved, "But I have adhered to that vision for over 40 years."

Want to read the full story? Pick up the April 2008 issue of DOG WORLD today, or subscribe to receive the best dog articles, dog news, and dog information every month!