



Should Purebreds BE PUREBRED?

BY CAROLINE COILE

The AKC was established in 1884 with the stated purpose of protecting and advancing purebred dogs. Part of its charter states that its objectives are “generally to do everything to advance the study, breeding, exhibiting, running, and maintenance of the purity of thorough-bred dogs.”

The AKC maintains breed purity by guarding the sanctity of its studbook, which is closed to new entries sometimes after a breed is recognized and considered to have sufficient purebred founders. There have been exceptions, of course. The Kennel Club has similar rules but has allowed exceptions. Nobody cares anymore about the well-documented fact that of the 14 founding dogs of the Shih Tzu breed, one was a Pekingese. That cross occurred in 1952, which was 12 years after the breed was recognized in the UK. It's said that the presence of this cross delayed AKC's acceptance of the Shih Tzu, but they did ultimately accept them in 1969—even if they did have a pinch of Peke.

But of course, we all know perhaps the majority of breeds are crossbreds, created by mixing a bit of this breed with a smidgeon of that breed and a pinch of yet another. Creating a new breed was often the passion of the landed gentry, who produced such breeds as the Gordon Setter (originally Gordon Castle Setter, originating with the Fourth Duke of Gordon) and Weimaraner (from the Court of Weimer, the product of a concerted series of various crosses). Just as often, a commoner concocted a new breed, such as the Dobermann Pinscher (created by Louis Dobermann by crossing German Pinschers, old German Shepherd, Black & Tan Manchester Terrier, and likely Greyhound and Weimaraner, to guard him on his tax-collecting rounds), or the Cesky Terrier (created by Frantisek Horak by crossing Scottish and Sealyham Terriers to produce a good hunter that could get along in packs and not get stuck in burrows). A few breeds, such as the Black Russian Terrier (created by the Soviet military by crossing Giant Schnauzer, Airedale Terrier, Rottweiler, and Moscow Water Dog, among others, in an effort to create an ideal military dog), even result from a planned vision carried out by a group or even government. However, what these breeds all have in common is they did not make themselves, but arose from purposeful crosses of various other breeds and dogs. In other words, in many cases, before there could be purebreds, there had to be

crossbreds—made from purebreds.

This all seems noble when we read of it being done a century or more ago. Take the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, genetically assembled by Edward Korthals starting in 1874. He crossed 20 dogs from seven different breeds, and by 1888 show classes for the Korthals Griffon were offered in England. All was well, except that during the ensuing century breeders (at least some breeders) noticed the gene pool was very shallow. So, in the 1980s they added in another cross, this time to the Cesky Fousek. One might think that an additional cross would be in keeping with the breed's origins, even if it happened a century later. But the parent club did not give their blessing and, as such, the AKC refused to register anything down from the cross. When it comes to breed crossing, the motto that it's better to ask forgiveness than permission does not apply.

SPOTLIGHTING THE DALMATIAN-POINTER CROSS

Sometimes even asking permission can go awry. No case illustrates the importance of parent club approval more than the story of the LUA Dalmatian.

It's the story of a single cross of a Dalmatian to a Pointer in 1973. The cross was made with the approval of the Dalmatian Club of America in order to introduce the gene for low uric acid (LUA) into the Dalmatian gene pool. At the time, every single Dal had high uric acid—which resulted in a high rate of urinary stones in the breed. Because every Dal had it, there was no possible way to breed away from the trait through selection.

One cross was made. The resulting offspring were tested for their uric acid level, and those with low uric acid were bred back to a Dalmatian. This continued for generations, always selecting for low uric acid, and always breeding back to a pure Dalmatian. Finally, in 1981 the AKC agreed to register two of the fifth-generation backcross Dals. But there was a problem. The leadership within the parent club had changed in the interim, and controversy arose concerning the recognition of these “mix-breeds.” It came to a membership vote in 1984—and purity won over health. The AKC rescinded the registration of the backcrossed dogs and any of their progeny.