

KENNEL BLINDNESS

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As part of the critical process of choosing a sire and dam, as well as deciding which puppies to keep, below we address the topic of kennel blindness.

"The breeder, to be successful, must look his dogs ...not only in the face, but in the body, front and running gear. Even to themselves many breeders will not acknowledge their failure when they fall short of their objective...and in an effort to convince others of the perfection of their dogs, [they] convince...usually only themselves." Onstott

DEFINITION

Found in many kennels of purebred dogs, kennel blindness is a "disease" which renders a breeder incapable of seeing faults in his own dogs. Kennel blind breeders tend to twist and distort the standard to justify the dogs they breed.

PROGNOSIS

Because serious faults can become set in a couple of generations, unless quickly diagnosed and treated, kennel blindness can be fatal to a successful breeding program.

SYMPTOMS

I. An inability to see and appreciate the good qualities in a competitor's dogs.

Kennel blind breeders tend to focus on negative features in dogs other than their own.

Suggestion: Re-read your breed's standard keeping in mind that most standards delineate the *essential* aspects of a breed, allowing breeders the freedom to express their own concepts of the *non-essentials*. In this way a range of excellence may be produced in a breed without sacrificing each dog's ability to fit into the standard.

II. The belief that you have bred the "perfect" dog.

No "perfect" dog has ever or will ever be bred in any breed. Even your best can always be improved upon.

Suggestion: Realize that your concept of what is ideal may change. Experience with a breed may gradually change the priority a breeder gives to certain features. A stickler for correct heads may gradually start emphasizing angulation and movement, realizing that the latter are also essential aspects of the breed.

III. Blaming the fact that your dog is not winning on bad judging, politics or anything except the possibility that there may be something wrong with your dog.

Kennel blind people always have an excuse for why their dog didn't win. While some of their reasoning may be legitimate, consistently losing under a variety of judges usually means a dog does not fit the standard in one or more important aspects.

Suggestion: If your dog is not winning, ask several knowledgeable people to evaluate your dog. Tell them to be honest and listen with an open mind.

RISK FACTORS

Kennel blindness is more apt to be a problem for the following:

Breeders who do not have an 'eye' for a dog.

Some breeders are simply not born with an 'eye' for a dog. Despite having read and studied their breed's standard, they are incapable of correctly evaluating structure and movement.

Novice breeders who are strongly affected by a dog's temperament and personality.

Many kennel blind people think all puppies are cute. These owners usually decide to breed their dog, not to improve the breed, but because they love his personality and want more puppies just like him.

Breeders who have produced quality animals in the past but are now struggling to stay on top.

Many successful breeders who have had past super stars are usually looking for their next big winner. They may be more prone to over-looking faults in their animals.

Breeders working with small numbers of dogs.

Because small breeders have less to choose from, they may not want to open their eyes to problems in their breeding program.

Breeders whose every waking moment revolves around dogs.

Making dogs a "live or die" situation can affect objectivity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT KENNEL BLIND

- A. *They are truly objective and rarely satisfied with their own dogs, criticizing them more harshly than others would.*
- B. *Regardless of time and effort already spent, they are ready to remove from their program dogs that do not pan out, even to the point of starting over with new foundation stock.*
- C. *They have an 'eye' for a dog and can appreciate a beautiful one regardless of who bred or owns it.*

TIPS FOR CURING KENNEL BLINDNESS

If caught in time, kennel blindness can be cured before it has a lasting, detrimental effect on your breeding program. Following are some tips.

1. **Avoid over-emphasizing a certain feature in your breeding program to the detriment of overall correctness.**

Although most breeders try to emphasize the excellence of the whole dog, it is human nature to over-emphasize certain features. In fact, the importance we give to a particular trait in our dogs is how we express our "breeding personality" and create what we feel comes close to our ideal. One breeder may be a stickler for fronts and another for toplines. .The danger here is that by focusing on just one feature we can become "blind" to other faults that may be creeping into the breeding program.

2. **To assess your kennel blindness level, ask someone whose opinion you respect to objectively evaluate your dogs.**

Some of the best people to ask are knowledgeable breeders who are not kennel blind themselves. Be sure this person really understands the standard and request that they honestly critique the virtues and faults in your dogs. Ask more than one qualified person and compare their evaluations with your own.

3. **If you are falling short of your objectives, it is most important to admit it to yourself.**

As difficult as it is to admit failure, the realization that our dogs do not possess certain virtues can be the first step in devising a plan to obtain what we really want.

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