

Type Versus Soundness

By David Post, DVM,MS 2007 Texterterriers.com

One of the frequent discussions in show breeding circles is the discussion of type (typical breed characteristics) verses soundness (desirable traits of conformation, health, and temperament fundamental to all dogs). Those that argue that type is more important will say that without type, you cannot tell what breed the dog is. In the establishment of a breed, this is clearly true. You have to select for specific characteristics that identify the breed, sometimes (in theory) sacrificing soundness characteristics, until type is established. However, when breeds are established, for many breeds including Airedales, the desired characteristics are specific performance traits of foundation stock. These outstanding original individuals were considered outstanding because of their fundamental qualities of health, temperament, and appearance. They were fundamentally sound dogs. Airedales have been an established breed for over a hundred years. Do we now need to still be breeding unsound dogs in order to have type? After 100 years, is there not sufficient type in sound dogs? The argument in favor of type is UNSOUND!

Today's breeders should absolutely insist that judges are trained to pick sound dogs. The standard states that the fundamental test of conformation is movement. Unsound dogs cannot move well. The standard also states that the breed is a moderate breed. No extreme characteristics. When show fads start driving the breed to "type", it is often extreme type. Really long, narrow heads, long necks, ultrashort backs, very upright shoulders, none of these things are in the breed standard. And many of these characteristics lead to fundamental unsoundnesses. Some individuals with these characteristics can move, some even have some mental acuity. Their descendants have those extreme characteristics, but often don't have the soundness traits. Unique individuals with extreme characteristics become big show winners. The breed moves in a new direction, characterized by unsoundness. In a breed that is a hundred years old, established breeders should should only breed fundamentally sound dogs, with stable temperaments, that move well.

The Excuse Trap All breeders fall into the excuse trap from time to time. The very promising youngster fails to live up to hopes. Often these short

falls are issues of soundness. The dog unexpected becomes shy or aggressive, or starts moving poorly, or develops dysplasia. You have so much hope built up in these dogs, that it is hard to let go. So you make excuses. "His bad behavior is because of event or accident X." "He is shy because of poor socialization". "She is aggressive because a handler at a dog show mishandled her." "He is dysplastic because he was hurt as a pup." "He is an outstanding specimen, the parts just don't quite go together quite right, so he moves a little funny in front."

There are no perfect dogs. They all have genetic flaws that can be seen, and some that can't be seen. But be honest, at least with yourself, about the flaws. And then pick your poison. Do you really want the dysplastic dog in your breeding program? The aggressive dog? Those shy dogs are easier for the typical pet owner to handle, right? Just another excuse? How much movement are you willing to sacrifice for "type"? For how many generations?