

The Politics of Dogs: Criticism of Policies of AKC

The Atlantic, 1990, 265(3), 49

BODY:

An organization created to protect the purity of dog bloodlines has become, a journalist argues, misguided in its view of "quality" and guilty of encouraging destructive forms of inbreeding that have robbed dogs of traditional skills and left them vulnerable to crippling disease

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY THE AMERICAN Kennel Club has presided over American dogdom with a confidence verging on arrogance, proclaiming itself the "principal registry agency for purebred dogs in the United States." From its headquarters in New York City the AKC sets the rules and regulations, certifies the judges, and publishes the results of the competitions sponsored annually by its more than 3,200 membership units and affiliates. For a fee (\$6 for a dog; \$15 for a litter) it records the offspring of all AKC-registered parents in its stud book and provides them with official certificates of pedigree. Its Complete Dog Book, published periodically, with frequent updatings, since 1929 and the best-selling canine reference book in America, contains photographs of and detailed information about the 130 breeds that the AKC currently recognizes, while ignoring the remaining 300 or so that exist in the world today.

"AKC information and shows create a market and demand for purebred dogs," says Alan Stern, the AKC's vice-president for communications. Dogs represent a \$7-billion-a-year industry in the United States, and much of that money is spent on the purchase, care, and feeding of purebred animals, especially those boasting AKC-recognized bloodlines. Of the roughly 57 million dogs now residing in 35 million American households, some 12 million possess AKC papers--half of those eligible. Another four to six million are registered with other organizations, the largest of which is the United Kennel Club, of Kalamazoo, Michigan. So dominant is the AKC that even those breeders choosing to remain outside its aegis must define themselves and their dogs in relation to it. Consumers wanting non-AKC purebreds are hard pressed even to find them.

Despite its wealth and power, the AKC has come under fire from an increasing number of critics who charge that it has done purebred dogs sometimes irreparable harm. The arguments of these veterinarians, breeders, trainers, and animal-rights advocates focus on three interrelated areas.

First, the AKC defines quality in a dog primarily on the basis of appearance, paying scant heed to such other canine characteristics as health, temperament, and habits of work. Over the years this policy has led to destructive forms of inbreeding that have created dogs capable only of conforming to human standards of beauty. Many can no longer perform their traditional tasks--herding, tracking, hunting--while more than a few cannot live outside a human-controlled environment.

Second, because it benefits financially from the registration of dogs produced and sold commercially, the AKC has failed to take a stand against the puppy mills and pet stores that exploit purebred dogs. It will neither refuse to register those animals--although many dogs, produced and sold under inhumane conditions, are of questionable pedigree and genetic fitness--nor cooperate with authorities seeking to regulate them. The result has been a decline, which even the AKC recognizes, in the quality of the animals that nearly 500,000 Americans buy from retailers each year.

Third, the AKC and its member clubs define purity in a breed according to an outmoded notion that is destructive of the health of the dogs. Unquestioning obedience to this notion has led the AKC to make arbitrary decisions regarding which breeds to recognize (on the grounds of such physical traits as coat texture and ear shape), to take no stand relating to the rescue of rare dogs, and to ignore issues relating to the proliferation of inheritable canine diseases. The AKC has also failed to act forcefully in response to breed-specific "vicious dog" ordinances proliferating around the country, though even the Humane Society of the United States considers these ordinances ill conceived.

In aggregate these criticisms imply a fundamental re-examination of the relationship of human beings to the dog, their oldest and most faithful domestic companion. Emerging from this re-examination is an expanded definition of "purebred," grounded in science and taking into account internal qualities and characteristics as well as appearance.

The American Kennel Club is "elitist, grossly undemocratic, and operationally secretive," according to Herm David, the influential columnist and self-styled AKC ombudsman for Dog World magazine. Having expelled its last individual members in 1923 on the grounds that they were gadflies, the AKC today has a membership that consists of some 450 clubs. They send representatives to a meeting of delegates, who elect a board of directors, which in turn selects a president. The board's deliberations, like those of the delegates, are closed to the media; its decisions appear in the official AKC Gazette.

The AKC and its apologists have met its critics with disdain, accusing some of wanting to abolish breeds in general and others of fear of competing in the canine big leagues. Reformers within the organization--like the current president, Kenneth Marden--often find themselves squeezed between people pressing for immediate action and powerful traditionalists who view any change as a fundamental attack on the cult of pedigree and the show dog.

The AKC relies on its certificate of pedigree, or papers, to guarantee that the bloodlines of, say, a Chesapeake Bay retriever are pure for at least three generations, and on its written standards to determine that the dog resembles others of its breed. These standards describe the overall appearance of a typical specimen and list such phenotypic characteristics as size, shape, coat, head, neck, ears, eye color, tail length, gait, and bite. The standards do not demand that a dog be able to perform its traditional function--that the Chesapeake be able to swim and fetch, for example.

All show dogs are judged against the ideal summed up in the standards, and in recent years the AKC has moved to have its "parent" clubs--those relating to specific breeds, which make up only about a third of its members--revise their standards, ostensibly to cull out ambiguity, so that judges can better understand what they should reward. Critics among the clubs contend that this "standardization of standards" is part of a broader effort to create a circuit of international dog shows, which would require a breed (the Saint Bernard, for example) to conform to the standards of foreign organizations for that breed. The ambiguity in the old standards, some of which date to the nineteenth century, allows wider latitude in judging animals, the critics argue, than will the precise statements of the new ones, which will restrict the already limited variability of American show dogs.

Alan Stern says, "The parent clubs are responsible for writing the standards for their breeds, and we can't make them change." However, he adds that the board must nonetheless approve them. "But if they don't revise those standards, judges may have a difficult time interpreting the old ones, and the dogs may suffer in judging."

The standards and the stud book form what geneticists call a "breed barrier," separating a certain strain or type of domestic animal from the larger population. Breed barriers may also occur naturally, with geographic isolation, as they did for the New Guinea singing dog and the basenji, a hound found in Central Africa. The dingo of Australia, usually classified as a separate species of canid, is a dog that was carried to that isolated continent and then went wild. In fact, subspecies of wild animals--of wolves, for example--arise because of natural breed barriers.

The Problem of Defining Breed

A BREED IS A GROUP OF GENETICALLY RELATED individuals with a common phenotype--physical characteristics, such as ear and muzzle shapes, and behavioral tendencies, such as those of a retriever to swim or a border collie to herd--which are capable of producing offspring of the same type. Fixed through selective breeding, traits could vanish over several generations if people became careless in choosing their dogs' mates. Practically and politically, breeds are human constructs. "While the differences between breeds are genetic," says Donald Patterson, the chief of medical genetics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, "the determination of when a breed becomes a breed is a human one."

I. Lehr Brisbin, a wildlife ecologist with the Department of Ecology at the University of Georgia, bluntly expresses the political definition employed by the AKC, for which he frequently serves as an expert witness: "The only way you can tell whether you have a purebred dog is by examining its papers." (Purebred dogs without papers represent a "type" in this view, rather than a "breed.")

AKC president Kenneth Marden presented the reductio ad absurdum of that perspective last May, during a hearing in a federal district court in Miami. The hearing had been ordered to determine the constitutionality of an ordinance in Dade County, Florida, regulating (and ultimately banning) by name the AKC's American Staffordshire terrier, the Staffordshire bull terrier, the United Kennel Club's American pit bull terrier, and any animal substantially conforming to their written standards, on the grounds that these dogs are inherently dangerous to human beings. Marden testified that based on looks alone he could not identify Lassie as a collie. He would have to examine the dog's certificate of pedigree.

Marden and his counterpart at the UKC, Fred Miller, who appeared in July as part of the same case, were attempting to show how difficult it is to define--and thus outlaw--"pit bulls," both the purebred strains the clubs register and the crossbreeds with other dogs, such as mastiffs. They both testified that they could not name a dog's breed by comparing the animal with an official standard. But they could not agree on whether the American pit bull terrier, which the for-profit UKC has registered since the late nineteenth century, is identical to the American Staffordshire terrier, which the nonprofit AKC first listed in 1936, several decades after dogfighting was outlawed. Miller said they were; the UKC cross-registers the AKC breed. Following AKC policy, Marden would not acknowledge that they were the same.

The squabbling over arcana, political infighting on the AKC's board of directors, and also what critics call an aversion among its members to becoming involved with owners of mongrels have caused the AKC to respond slowly to the most ill-considered of the "vicious dog" ordinances that have proliferated in recent years. Dade County acted in April of last year. In June the New York City Health Department promulgated a ban on dogs that substantially conform to the UKC's phenotypic standards for the American pit bull terrier. At the time, New York City's chief veterinarian boasted that he would soon identify the gene that made pit bulls meaner than any other breed. Joining the fray, other municipalities have added to their "breed-specific" legislation German shepherds, Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers, akitas, and chow chows. Although the Dade County ordinance was upheld, the New York regulation was suspended by the state supreme court after being challenged by the AKC and other groups. (Subsequently city officials failed to produce the mean gene.) Ironically, nearly everyone involved with dogs recognizes these breed-specific bans as bad legislation, passed in response to hysterical media reports of fatal attacks by "pit bulls." The Humane Society's surveys show that UKC- and AKC-registered American pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, and Staffordshire bull terriers, their once-belligerent temperaments gentled over the years through selective breeding, are thus far not guilty. The perpetrators are both mixed breeds and non-registered purebred animals made vicious by people. Those who illegally fight dogs today do so with animals whose bloodlines they jealously guard and maintain.

The legislation has spurred research into canine genetics, which, although not well funded, has already helped expand our limited understanding. Last October, Joe W. Templeton, a professor of veterinary pathology and genetics at Texas A&M University, hosted a workshop to examine issues relating to breed identification based on genetic analyses. "Right now, looking at chromosomes and genetic fingerprinting, we cannot distinguish between breeds," Templeton says. (Genetic fingerprinting does allow one to distinguish between individual dogs.) "In fact, in a comparison of two American Staffordshire terriers with a whippet, one terrier appeared more closely related to the whippet than to the other terrier. Genetic differences between breeds, and even between dogs and wolves, are apparently very subtle. Probably just a handful of genes expressed in various combinations account for the different phenotypes we see." John Patton, an evolutionary biologist at Washington University, in St. Louis, and a participant in the workshop, says, "A lot of these breeds are more heterogeneous than we thought." The dog is, in fact, the most variable species in the animal kingdom next to man, and that variability accounts for its remarkable intelligence and talents. Dogs range in size from four pounds (the Chihuahua) to 220 pounds (the Tibetan mastiff), and in temperament from the placid to the ferocious. They vary widely in shape, from the low-slung dachshund to the long-legged wolfhound. Some are capable of learning to retrieve fallen prey or to flush a fox from its den, others to rescue drowning people.

Patton believes that with more research, biologists will be able to connect specific genes to distinctive morphologies and tendencies of breeds, and to determine what combinations create a Yorkshire terrier, say, rather than a Great Dane. Already the inquiries are casting new light on the natural history of the dog.

A Short History of Dogs

IN RECENT YEARS A CONSENSUS HAS BEGUN TO FORM around the wolf, *Canis lupus*, as the primary progenitor of the dog, contrary to arguments set forth in the past for the jackal or even a form of wild dog as the primary progenitor. Going a step further, Patton says flatly, "As far as we can tell from our genetic analyses, *Canis familiaris*, the dog, doesn't exist. It's *Canis lupus*. They hybridize freely and their offspring are fertile. All the breeds we see, from the teacup Chihuahua to the giant mastiff, are subsets of the grey wolf. The dog is a man-made artifact." The wolf, like its domestic cousin, is variable in terms of color, size, and personality, is socialized within its packs, and is capable of a range of specialized behavior. Wolves are known to herd their prey, for example, and within a pack one or more may serve as trackers while others hunt.

Though genetically one species, the wolf and the dog are worlds apart culturally and socially. Templeton says, "Wolves, and even crosses between wolves and dogs, are wild animals that you don't want as a pet. Even when hand-raised from infancy, they retain a certain wildness, a wariness and distrust of humans that make them unpredictable and untrainable except by the most skilled experts. But dogs are bred to live with people. Their behavior, as well as their physical appearance, has been altered by man."

Although some paleontologists continue to seek an evolutionary Eden and a single ancestor for the dog, the apparent truth is that toward the end of the last Ice Age and of the Pleistocene Epoch itself, small bands of hunters and gatherers began to domesticate several of the approximately forty subspecies of *Canis lupus* living throughout the Northern Hemisphere, which were competing with them for food, and traveling in their shadow. (The Southern Hemisphere has its own species of wild canids, some of which may one day be reclassified as wolves.) Stanley J. Olsen, an anthropologist at the University of Arizona and the author of *Origins of the Domestic Dog*, has identified early centers of this activity as the North American Arctic, Northern Europe (from Russia to the British Isles), the Near East, and China.

These domesticated animals became differentiated from their wild progenitors in subtle ways, developing shorter jaws, weaker teeth, curved tails, and a tendency to show white spots and red coloration on their coats. Most important, they learned to accept human beings as their pack leaders. Eventually dogs matured sexually at a younger age, with bitches going into first heat at six to nine months old and then coming into season twice a year--as opposed to two years and annually for the wolf.

We surmise that the first dog was a totem animal associated with cults of the dead, a camp scavenger, an occasional hunter and tracker, a playmate (as a puppy) for children, and a food source in times of necessity and celebration. Curbing its tendency to howl, the dog made barking--a little-used wolf talent--its primary form of vocalization, and became in the process a valued sentinel. (For unknown reasons the basenji doesn't bark.) By the dawn of the Neolithic Age, as people in the ancient Near East learned to cultivate grain and husband sheep and cattle, the role of the dog as a companion and helper began to expand considerably. Into the present Native Americans have maintained dogs of the ancient type that could draw a travois or sled and could assist in the hunt.

Many canine historians, seeking the most ancient prototype, attempt to trace even distinctly modern breeds to the Neolithic. But these histories are mostly stories, according to Olsen: "Authors repeat the same material without documentation or proof." Faced with scant records--a few figurines and line drawings--all one can reasonably do is speculate about the order of appearance of a few types, and sometimes their wolf forebears. At an early date *Canis lupus pallipes*, the small Asian wolf, probably gave rise to animals resembling the New Guinea singing dog, the dingo, and the pariahs of the Middle East and India, as well as certain Native American dogs. *Canis lupus arabs*, the desert wolf, might have been the progenitor of the sight hounds appearing in the Middle East 7,000 to 9,000 years ago. In the Fertile Crescent herdsman raised large guardians for their flocks, animals capable of besting wolves, the bane of domestic livestock, in combat. These may have been related to the mastiff types, believed to have originated in the mountains of Tibet and northern India from *Canis lupus chanco*, the Chinese or woolly-coated wolf. *Canis lupus lupus*, the grey wolf, produced the wolfish Eskimo dogs and related animals.

Evidence indicates that for several millennia people throughout the world regularly crossed their dogs with local wild canids, and the practice continues in some areas to the present day. The ancient Greeks tied bitches in heat outside so that wolves could mate with them. Native Americans on the Great Plains apparently sought the coyote, the Trickster, as an occasional sire to instill intelligence in their dogs. And

sled dogs were also bred to wolves, to produce pups with the stamina needed for survival in the Arctic. At Texas A&M, Templeton crossed a Labrador retriever with a grey wolf and came up with a "black wolf with floppy ears" that was at once wary and delicate in his approach to human beings. Dogs and wolves are hybridized by some kennels to produce exotic guard dogs and pets.

Differentiation into breeds has occurred accidentally and on purpose for as long as dogs have been known, but most early distinctions clearly had to do with place or tribe of origin or with function. At the dawn of their empire the Romans recognized companion, hunting, war, draft, and guard dogs, and sight and scent hounds.

Monasteries served as centers for dog breeding during the Middle Ages, especially the early years, and Crusaders brought new animals from the Middle East for their hunting packs and castles. While feral dogs often terrorized the countryside, and giant hounds capable of dragging a man from his horse went to war, the companion dog symbolized the Christian virtues of fidelity and domesticity. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European adventurers and traders served as agents for the dispersal and mixing of breeds around the world.

One of the first attempts at the classification of dogs during this period was made by the physician Johannes Caius, in his 1576 treatise *Of Englishe Dogges*. Caius grouped his dogs according to function, identifying the Terrare, or terrier, developed on the British Isles and named for its ability to pursue game under ground; the Bludhunde; the Harier; the Gasehunde; the Grehunde; the Leuimer, which is lost to history; spaniels, setters, and Fynders, or water spaniels, probably like poodles; and the Shepherdes Dogge and Mastiue, or Bandogge--mastiffs that helped butchers in their work and that were also used for the popular blood sports of bull and bear baiting. Caius also identified a "Spaniel gentle," which resembled the modern Cavalier King Charles spaniel; a "theevish," or poaching, dog; and a "tumbler," or rabbit dog. A distinguishing characteristic of all these animals was that when properly bred, they "kept their type"; that is, they produced offspring that looked and behaved like their parents, whereas mongrels--the wappe, the turnspete, and the dauncer--did not. Even so, the purebred dogs varied more greatly from the phenotype than do today's show dogs.

The English Bandogge, which had a shortened muzzle and strong jaws, would grasp a bull by its nose so that a butcher could bleed it to death, a process believed to produce the best meat. Into the nineteenth century some owners would attempt to prove a dog's tenacity by mutilating its feet and legs while it held the bull in its jaws. These bulldogs were larger than present-day show bulldogs, which are noteworthy for their low-slung bodies, unnaturally large heads, pushed-in faces, and undershot jaws. But the American bulldog, a non-AKC animal, which weighs 100 to 130 pounds, is believed to continue in the old style. Mixed with terriers, the bull and bear dogs became pit bulls in the nineteenth century, when dogfighting peaked in popularity in England and North America.

Through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century people continued to mix and match dogs to their needs. European paintings and descriptions from the period portray many of the animals Caius identified, plus a few others--the rough water dogs called Newfoundlands, whippets for chasing rabbits and rats, various pointers, and retrievers. We know that people bred their dogs for the work habits and traits they desired, often carefully tracking their lineage. But all these animals, even companion dogs like the Pomeranian, were more robust than the dogs we know today.

The Modern Concept of Breeds

THROUGH THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH century people in Britain, Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia set out to control the dog's evolution scientifically, fixing standards and creating detailed registries. They saved from extinction a number of ancient types, such as the Scottish deerhound and the Irish wolfhound. They blended others and constructed scores of new breeds through selective crosses to emphasize working characteristics, size, color,

markings, ear shape, or muzzle formation.

By some estimates as many as a thousand distinct breeds of dog have existed during the past ten thousand years, 400 to 440 of which are alive today. Warfare, trade, annihilation of indigenous peoples, and natural extinction account for the disappearance of the others. The current count is vague because

the process of establishing breeds, either from old types never entered in modern registries or from new crosses, continues.

In recent years a few individuals and groups have searched for animals representing ancient types that they could consolidate into a modern breed. The wildlife ecologist I. Lehr Brisbin is working to establish a registry for the pariah "Carolina dog"--threatened by hybridization with other feral dogs and loss of habitat--which he believes is a direct descendant of the ancient dog kept by Native American tribes of southeastern North America and, perhaps, a key to understanding canine evolution. He and John Patton are also interested in helping Native Americans preserve their distinctive tribal dogs, only a few of which are believed to remain in their pure state.

Worldwide, too, a few breeds dwell outside the fold in isolated regions, and some, like the Australian kangaroo dog and the New Guinea singing dog, may perish, victims of dwindling interest, usefulness, and habitat. No national kennel club works to save these and other breeds nearing extinction, nor do the animals appear on international lists of endangered species.

IN ESTABLISHING WHAT WE KNOW AS MODERN BREEDS, nineteenth-century sportsmen kept careful records, and began to organize competitions to display and test their dogs. The first recorded dog show took place in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, in 1859; six years later the first field trial was held at Southill in Bedfordshire. In 1873 English dog fanciers organized The Kennel Club to impose order on their new "sport" and to maintain the stud book for their dogs. The dog competition spread rapidly through the British Empire, North America, and Western Europe. The first American dog show took place in Mineola, New York, in 1874; the first Westminster Kennel Club Show, in New York in 1877, drew 1,201 dogs, and the show has been held annually since then.

In 1884 sportsmen in the United States formed the American Kennel Club as an umbrella organization for clubs devoted to promoting specific breeds and sponsoring shows. Two years later Nicholas Rowe presented to the fledgling organization the first three volumes of his American Kennel Stud Book, listing 5,397 spaniels, pointers, Chesapeake dogs and retrievers, and setters, among others. That stud book now contains entries for 32 million dogs, representing 130 breeds, not including crossbred setters that Rowe recognized and the AKC stopped registering because they were not pure. Incongruously, the AKC keeps a separate registry for the American Coon Hunters Association, while recognizing formally one of its seven breeds, and maintains as quasi-members clubs for ten breeds in its "miscellaneous" class. In contrast, The Kennel Club of England recognizes more than 180 breeds, and the Federation Cynologique Internationale, in Belgium, recognizes 300.

Since 1955 the AKC's board of directors has followed a formal procedure that requires new breeds to have been registered by a foreign kennel club for at least thirty years or by a domestic registry for several generations and to be represented in the United States by a club with a minimum of a hundred members, who own more than a hundred dogs. The animals must be free only of the sort of genetic deformities that would keep them out of the show ring without corrective surgery (for example, eyelids that obscure vision) and must produce offspring conforming to the standard written by their sponsoring club and approved by the AKC. The club must also maintain a registry, according to AKC specifications. After a period of "development" in the miscellaneous class, which typically lasts two to five years and is designed to introduce the dog to the show world and ensure that a sufficient number of the breed exist around the country to make its registration financially feasible, it will be recognized, if the AKC and the sponsoring club agree.

Dogs in the miscellaneous class can appear at shows but cannot compete for championship points or best-of-show titles. They can also compete in AKC-sanctioned obedience trials and tracking tests but are ineligible for all other competitions--field trials, herding tests, and the like. (Although nonaffiliated animals are not allowed in AKC competitions, a growing number of local clubs are organizing "rare" breed shows or "super matches" for all purebred dogs.)

James Crowley, the AKC's director of dog events and a primary contact for supplicants, says, "There's a lot of variability in some of these dogs that must be bred out before they can be registered." Such comments confirm the worst fears of the AKC's critics--that membership means disaster, an emphasis on appearance to the exclusion of other characteristics. Clubs for the Australian kelpie, the border collie, and

the Cavalier King Charles spaniel--all in the miscellaneous class for at least twenty-five years--shun full recognition for that reason.

But for members of these clubs and others seeking admission, the miscellaneous class provides access to the large number of AKC-sanctioned obedience tests, which, they believe, challenge a dog's abilities. (Most small rarebreed clubs simply cannot offer enough events around the country to satisfy those wanting to compete.) Inclusion in the AKC's miscellaneous class also provides a club with a certain legitimacy and national visibility as the representative of its breed.

Asked how long the AKC will tolerate breed clubs that make no move toward full recognition, Crowley says he doesn't know. The AKC does not benefit materially from dogs in the category, because it doesn't register them. For popular breeds like the border collie and the Cavalier King Charles spaniel, the number of dogs is not insubstantial.

Breeding Dogs for Show

DURING THE PAST FORTY YEARS EXPLOSIVE growth has turned the once genteel sport of breeding and showing purebred dogs into an often brutal business, replete with charges of inhumane treatment, commercial exploitation, fraud, and the ruination of entire breeds.

In 1956 the AKC listed five million dogs in its stud book. Since then it has registered 27 million, roughly half of those eligible, averaging a million a year since 1977. The number of AKC-sponsored events has increased from 1,750 a year to more than 11,000, with the number of dogs participating rising fivefold, from 300,000 to 1.5 million. Shows make up 60 percent of the events and draw about 90 percent of the participants.

Until the 1920s dog shows were the domain of local clubs. Then, responding to demands for uniformity, the AKC began to set rules and otherwise consolidate its power. During this period the AKC, for judging purposes, divided purebred dogs into groups, based loosely on their function: sporting, including pointers, retrievers, spaniels, and hounds; working, including the herding breeds; terriers; toy breeds; and nonsporting, including dalmatians, poodles, and bulldogs, which had ceased to perform their respective tasks as hunting and then coach dogs, water dogs, and butcher's helpers. In 1937 a separate group was established for hounds, in 1983 for herding dogs.

Dogs, grouped according to sex, compete in various classes--puppy, novice, bred-by-exhibitor, American-bred, and open--and then the victors in all classes vie for the titles of Winner's Dog and Winner's Bitch. Those two then compete against dogs that are already Champions for Best of Breed. Those dogs compete against others holding that title for Best of Group, and the winners are then judged against one another to determine Best of Show. The Winner's Dog and Winner's Bitch earn points toward the title Champion, which becomes a prefix to their names and enhances the value of their offspring in the marketplace.

Through the Second World War most American dog shows were two-to three-day displays of breeding stock, largely featuring wealthy collectors' animals, handled by professional kennel men. After the war, shows became ever shorter, benches were removed (except at prestigious competitions like the Westminster Kennel Club show), and judging became a race against the clock. Today at large events as many as 4,000 dogs--the vast majority with professional handlers--may be judged in one day.

By the 1950s, after a century of trying, people had learned to produce sound dogs. But now they wanted something more extreme and beautiful to attract jaded officials, so they exaggerated particular features--coast, heads, even the overall size of the dog. By the AKC's own estimates, a majority of newcomers to the sport, obsessed with championship ribbons, stick with it an average of five years. When they give up or move on to a new hobby, they leave behind a trail of damaged bloodlines, since they breed dogs not just to conform to standards but also to match those winning in the ring.

Because the dog is genetically highly variable, consistently ideal specimens are difficult to produce, making the breeding process uncertain. That and the overall decline in quality cause veterans to guard their successful bloodlines jealously, engaging in what they like to call line breeding--mating a dog back to its granddam or grandsire, for example. They may also inbreed; daughter to father, son to mother.

(Geneticists consider line breeding a form of inbreeding and do not bother with such euphemistic distinctions.) "You can't be successful raising show dogs without line breeding, because that's the only way you can know what you're dealing with genetically," says Robert Hetherington, the chairman of First Jersey Savings and Loan and, with his wife, Jean, the owner and breeder of the top-winning bulldog in recent years. "But problems do arise when people aren't careful."

Line breeding sometimes produces superstars of the ring--admirable animals in all respects. But it is dangerous, and lately the practice has been blamed for the loss of natural instincts, talents, health, and temperament in many dogs. Partisans of the border collie, considered the finest sheepherder in the world, eschew the practice in favor of mating unrelated dogs with exceptional ability, as do many other breeders of working dogs--be they herders or hunters.

Critics like Michael W. Fox, a veterinarian and animal behaviorist with the Humane Society, contend that the cult of conformation, with its reliance on inbreeding and selective breeding for extreme traits, has ruined a number of otherwise respectable breeds. Of the AKC's Irish setters Fox says, "They're so dumb they get lost on the end of their leash."

The cocker spaniel, along with the poodle, the perennial favorite of American pet buyers, has not competed in field trials since 1965, having lost its ability to hunt. Elizabeth Spalding, a leading breeder of Cavalier King Charles spaniels, says, "Most people don't know it, but up until the 1970s a sentence in the cocker-spaniel standard stated that a dog could be penalized for excessive coat. But for twenty years cockers had been bred for long coats, which brought them championships." The long-haired little hunter has developed a reputation as a foul-tempered, possessive, and nervous creature.

In the 1950s show people turned the German shepherd into a weak-hipped animal with a foul temper and bizarre downward-sloping hindquarters. A few breeders are trying to restore the dog to its former dignity. The Monks of New Skete, a religious order in the Orthodox Catholic Church, near Cambridge, New York, have for twenty-two years worked to produce dogs without those problems. "We stopped using American dogs and turned to German ones, because breeding there is better controlled," says Brother John, a member of the order, which has a waiting list of more than a year for its dogs.

Many of the toy breeds are so small and fragile that they cannot live outside artificial environments. The bulldog and the Boston terrier have difficulty whelping naturally, because of the breeds' exaggerated heads, and bitches are regularly subjected to cesarean sections. Hetherington says, "The bulldog is a man-made dog, and man has to be responsible for it. The dog hasn't come out perfectly, but that's reason to keep trying to improve the breed, not to abandon it."

The problem exists throughout the world. In Australia the kelpie, which is considered a rival to the border collie in the management of sheep, became the darling of the show ring in the 1930s and within three decades had nearly lost its herding instinct. In the 1960s the Working Kelpie Council of Australia began to rescue the breed, by establishing a registry for working stock. In the United States the Australian kelpie has been in the AKC's miscellaneous class since 1941, and Susan Thorp, the secretary of Working Kelpies, the American breed club, wants to keep it there. "In the AKC," she says, "the dog becomes an object. People get dogs, don't use them, and then selectively breed them for characteristics other than work."

Peter Borchelt, an animal behaviorist in Forest Hills, New York, says that springer spaniels, mostly the males, born of a particular show line frequently develop dominance-related behavioral problems that lead them to become aggressive toward their owners, while those from field stock don't manifest that tendency. Among Labrador retrievers there are as many as three distinct varieties with different characteristics--show dogs, somewhat large and slow-footed; dogs adept at AKC field trials, smaller and more high-strung; and working dogs, varying in appearance but bred for their ability to swim and retrieve.

Among other AKC-recognized hunting breeds--including the German shorthaired pointer, the Chesapeake Bay retriever, the pointer, the Brittany, the Gordon setter, and the English setter--are dogs that can point, retrieve, or flush birds as well as any every have. People work hard to preserve those traits, and they don't intend to stop. (Many register their dogs not with the AKC but with American Field, an organization in Chicago devoted to field dogs.) But the trend among people who want breeds unspoiled by an overemphasis on appearance is toward animals the AKC doesn't deign to register, such

as the Catahoula leopard dog, Australian and English shepherds, the beauceron, and European pointers (including the English).

The trend has not escaped the notice of the AKC. Kenneth Marden, the AKC's president, says, "We have gotten away from what dogs were originally bred for. In some cases we have paid so much attention to form that we have lost the use of the dog." Marden has supervised the establishment of herding tests, which are scheduled to begin this winter and are subject to a great deal of controversy among people with working stock dogs, who argue that AKC animals like the collie and the Old English sheep dog will prove unable to complete them. Marden has also expressed interest in terrier tests to measure the dogs' ability to flush game from underground dens, and in lure coursing for sight hounds and whippets.

He has publicly recognized the need to emphasize function as well as form, despite strong opposition from the AKC's powerful traditionalists, who argue that he is denigrating shows. They have nothing to fear. In some European countries dogs must excel both in the field and in the ring, and be judged physically sound, before they can become Champions. But an AKC dog can become a Champion in the show ring alone.

The Growth of the Puppy Mill

"I HAVE THE ADMIT THAT PART OF THE MOTIVATION for these new activities is mercenary," Marden says. "Our programs are funded by registration. By providing more ways for people to enjoy their dogs, we're giving them more reasons to register them." In 1988, for the first time in memory, according to Herm David, of Dog World, the AKC registered fewer than 50 percent of the dogs born in AKC-registered litters. (Much of the AKC's increase in absolute numbers over the past decade has come, he says, through the recognition of new breeds.) David believes that the slippage represents an organization in decline.

Beginning in the 1950s, breeding "AKC dogs" for sale to a seemingly insatiable public became a way for hobbyists to earn extra money, and for kennel owners to earn a living. The "doggie in the window" became a commodity, mass-produced in a puppy mill and sold to a broker and then to a pet store. (Department stores routinely carried pets through the 1960s, when animal-protection advocates brought an end to the practice; now animals are sold through per-store chains.) The AKC earned money each step of the way--with registration of the litter by the breeder, from transfer slips filled out whenever the puppies passed through middlemen, and when the proud new owner registered his or her pup. The AKC grew as the number of dogs grew, regardless of their quality.

After extensive lobbying by the Humane Society, in 1970 puppy mills and brokers were brought under the jurisdiction of the federal Animal Welfare Act, which authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture to license and inspect dealers, exhibitors, transporters, and researchers dealing with animals "not raised for food or fiber." But this step brought little change.

Robert Baker, an investigator for the Humane Society, says, "For the past twenty years the USDA hasn't been enforcing its regulations, and the AKC hasn't taken any action because it profits from the sale of half a million dogs a year through pet stores. The AKC charter says it has authority to regulate breeders to preserve the health and welfare of purebred dogs, but it does nothing." In the winter of 1980-1981 Baker conducted an investigation of 294 commercial breeders in the Midwest, out of 3,886 breeders and brokers licensed by the USDA, and documented unsanitary, inhumane practices by nearly all of them. Many of the breeders were elderly framers trying to eke out their income, who regarded their dogs much as they would have chickens or any other cash-producing livestock.

Baker found that brokers, the middlemen, may deal with as many as 200 kennels, which produce anywhere from four to more than a hundred litters a year. Although the shipment of animals is regulated, brokers show little concern for what they consider a commodity.

Baker also concluded that many of these puppy-mill products were fraudulently registered with the AKC, and to prove how easy it was to cheat, he registered nonexistent Labrador retrievers. When he publicized his action, the AKC, following the venerable policy of killing the messenger, suspended him indefinitely from any of its activities, a punishment he doesn't rue. "I estimate that fifty percent of the dogs in the AKC registry have impure bloodlines," he says. Alan Stern, the AKC's vice-president for communications, dismisses the charge, saying that registration is based on honesty and trust, which Baker callously

violated and for which he, like any other miscreant, was punished. No one knows the degree of impurity in the stud book's bloodlines.

Baker's report aroused public protest but not federal action. Throughout the Reagan years the USDA asked for less money than it received to run its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which is charged with licensing commercial breeders and brokers. (In 1989 the number nationwide stood at 4,415.) And under the Bush Administration the service continues to have an abysmal record on regulating dog abusers.

Frustrated by federal inaction, a state representative in Kansas, Ginger Barr, authored legislation in 1987 to regulate the puppy mills in her state through inspection and licensing. "I was raised to think of AKC papers like the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," Barr says, "but they wouldn't help us. They're the largest registry in the world, but they won't give us the names of breeders in Kansas." Stern says that providing the list would amount to an invasion of privacy and would wrongly lump responsible kennel owners with those engaged in exploitation. He also says that although the USDA is responsible for licensing commercial breeders, it hasn't prosecuted violators. Kansas, he argues, has failed to hire enough inspectors to enforce the 1987 law properly, and should not expect the AKC to do its work. All these charges are true, but it is also the case that the AKC has not acted vigorously to regulate its breeders; in 1989 it canceled for fraud the papers of 460 litters out of a total of 550,300 and some 785 dogs out of 1.2 million. William F. Stifel, then the president of the AKC, whether the AKC would register a blind, deaf, three-legged purebred pup with hip dysplasia and green fur. According to Parade, Stifel said, "We would register the dog. AKC unfortunately does not mean quality." Stern's post, as it happens, was created soon after. It has a long to go. In 1987 a reporter for Parade, Michael Satchell, asked

Stern is not as blunt as Stifel, but the AKC prints similar caveats in its guides to buying a dog. One brochure states, "Many people breed their dogs with no concern for the qualitative demands of the standard for their breed. When this occurs repeatedly over several generations, the animals, while still purebred, can be of extremely low quality. . . ." Stern insists that competition in the marketplace will force commercial breeders to produce healthy puppies. "Whenever we do take action," he adds, "we are accused of restraint of trade."

Evidence from scores of breeders and from owners of store-bought pets strongly suggests that Stern is wrong about the effects of competition. Then too, more than physical well-being is at stake in this conflict. Joe Templeton, of Texas A&M, says, "Puppy-mill dogs are poorly socialized. The crucial periods for puppies to form human contact are six to twelve weeks and again from four to six months. Without that, they often have behavioral problems. Most puppies sold through stores are more than three months old and have missed the first of these periods."

A few states, notably Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Iowa, and Illinois, inspect pet stores, and some, including New York and New Jersey, require limited guarantees for consumers. But, Baker says, these are weak statutes, often erratically enforced. At most stores puppies (not to mention kittens) receive no medical care and can suffer from worms, dehydration, and malnutrition, in addition to genetic defects. Animals that are sickly and remain unsold are sometimes killed and thrown away.

Baker and other critics charge that the AKC has refused to take an active stand against commercial exploitation because it derives more than 70 percent of its annual income (which was \$ 19.4 million in 1988) from the registration of litters and dogs. That money, they point out, supports all AKC activities, including those in behalf of dog shows and trials, which promote appearance--conformation to an idelized breed standard--as the essence of quality.

The Humane Society of the United States calculates that the roughly 500,000 dogs (representing 100,000 litters) sold each year by pet stores come almost exclusively from puppy mills. By the most conservative estimate these dogs make up 20 percent of those the AKC registered in 1988.

Like all responsible dog people, Marden urges potential buyers to investigate the characteristics of the breed and the health of the parents. He says flatly, "Don't buy the dog in the pet store! See the dam, and the sire, if possible." But, Baker says, such advice is meaningless so long as no action is taken to curb the abuses of the puppy trade. The AKC fails even to support those of its constituent clubs that prohibit members from selling through pet stores.

A recent example of greed run amok involves a breed not recognized by the ACK, the Chinese shar-pei. This fighting and guard dog neared extinction in China during the 1950s and 1960s, when Mao Zedong campaigned against the ownership of dogs, calling it bourgeois recidivism. A dozen of the dogs were exported from Hong Kong to the United States in the late 1960s and became the foundation stock for all subsequent American shar-pei.

During the 1980s the demand for non-AKC--and therefore "unruined"--rare breeds, combined with a fascination with the wrinkled appearance of shar-pei, made them a yuppie fad. Some sold for as much as \$ 10,000, as compared with \$ 6,500 for a top working-stock dog, like an Australian kelpie. During the height of the craze one puppy mill produced 150 dogs a year, which sold for an average of \$ 1,000, and a pair appeared in the 1983 Neiman-Marcus Christmas catalogue, to the consternation of dog-lovers. From a dozen the population exploded in twenty years to 50,000. There are share-pei, mini-pei, and pug-pei. Sloppily bred from a limited gene pool, these dogs have developed auto-immune deficiencies leading to severe skin disorders, and faulty bites that sometimes make it impossible for them to eat. Their hips are bad; their eyelids need to be surgically cut from over the eye. Many display the foul temper for a bunch-drunk fighter. They are what veterinarians call a genetic disaster.

Last summer the market collapsed on shar-pei, and the breed's defenders hope that the protection of the AKC miscellaneous class, which the breed entered in 1988, will allow them to correct genetic flaws--a Sisyphean task. Meanwhile, many shar-pei are appearing in animal shelters, abandoned by owners no longer interested in supporting a dog that has fallen from vogue.

An ironic result of the shar-pei saga is that it seems to have encouraged some breed clubs to seek AKC recognition for their animals, in the hope that it will prevent them from becoming the next "hot" dog. They hope that as just another member of the registry, the dogs will lose the classification "rare" and avoid exploitation.

The successor to the shar-pei would appear to be the non-AKC dogue de Bordeaux, the homely French mastiff, which rode a starring role in last summer's popular film *Turner and Hooch* into the hearts of faddists. They want "one just like Hooch." People cashing in proclaim that the dogue is a sweetheart with children. The truth--that it is a large dog with a short temper, requiring a firm hand and sound training--would hurt sales.

Breeding as Corruption

Commercial breeding--including that practiced by backyard hobbyists--is ugly underbelly of the purebred-dog world. "The unrestricted breeding of dogs has produced a situation in which four-and-a-half million unwanted animals are put to death each year," says Guy Hodge, the director of data and information at the Humane Society. "And many of those who survive lead lives of quiet despair in kennels, on the street, even in homes."

To dog fanciers of the old school, commercialization corrupts absolutely. "A breed can be ruined when it becomes popular and people raise dogs to make a lot of money," Robert Hetherington, the bulldog breeder, says. John Glass, the clerk and keeper of the registry for the Masters of Foxhounds Association, says that among hunt clubs, which are admittedly bastions of privilege, the trade in puppies is noncommercial and stud fees are nonexistent. But questions of quality, of producing healthy dogs free of genetic abnormalities, affect everyone in the business.

The AKC has shown little interest in addressing the severe genetic defects associated with dog breeding. Stern, for example, argues that hip dysplasia, a malformation of the ball and socket, is both a genetic problem and a consequence of the dog's nutrition and upbringing, while the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, in Columbia, Missouri, which was established to study the problem, states unequivocally that the crippling ailment is genetic--albeit one involving a number of genes, working in combinations as yet unknown.

In some breeds (for example, the Saint Bernard) dysplasia is nearly universal, although it varies in intensity from occasionally uncomfortable to so debilitating that either total hip replacement or destruction of the animal is necessary. Greg Keller, one of the principal veterinarians at the OFA, says that in theory dogs from a litter in which even one member developed dysplasia should not be bred--but such a radical

step would spell economic disaster for most kennel owners. "The best they can do," he says, "is breed the most-normal dogs they have." In Europe, and in the United States, that practice has produced improvement in some breeds.

Genetic ailments affect the eyes, bones and joints, urinary tract, skin, heart, lungs, mouth and teeth, and endocrine and metabolic systems. Some dogs, for example, have problems absorbing specific vitamins. Even the predisposition of the Doberman pinscher, the Rottweiler, and other breeds to parvovirus, a killing disease among puppies and old dogs, may be genetic. Studies have also shown that 15 to 30 percent of purebred puppies die before weaning, and that the closer the inbreeding that produced the litter, the higher the mortality rate. This "fading puppy syndrome" obviously has a genetic component, but research has yet to find it.

Donald Patterson, at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, is establishing a data bank of genetic defects to which particular breeds are susceptible, with funding from the AKC. He says that more than 300 diseases in dogs are currently known to be hereditary, and an average of ten new ones are found each year. Many of those are associated with recessive genes, which can become expressed during inbreeding for desirable characteristics. Thus Catahoulas with double-glass, or pale blue, eyes, which are prized, often produce deaf puppies are from unrelated bloodlines can have problems. Border collies, for example, are prone to progressive retinal atrophy, a degenerative eye disease, and increasingly to hip dysplasia. Naturally, defects can be bred out of a line, providing that sound scientific principles are applied.

Dogs being a particularly apt model for research on certain human disorders canine genetics has become better understood to date primarily as a result of research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. Funds are scarce for programs developed solely to dogs.

The AKC not only has been slow in investigating genetic disorders but also not taken steps to encourage their elimination. This failure is inexplicable, given that dog shows are supposed to present breeding stock. Unlike some European kennel clubs, the AKC does not require that dogs be free of dysplasia and other cytoskeletal ailments before they can compete for championships. In fact, only surgery to correct defects brings disqualification in the show ring, notwithstanding that many alternations go undetected. Nearly all of the several score of breeders I interviewed for his article mentioned illegal cosmetic surgery as a major problem among show dogs. (The AKC is typically ambivalent about this issue, prohibiting operations to correct eye problems while endorsing ear-cropping, a painful operation to make ears stand erect, in Doberman pinschers, boxers, Great Danes, and others. Britain abolished ear-cropping seventy years ago for humanitarian reasons; most other nations--and some states--have followed suit.)

The traditional solution of destroying genetically unsatisfactory animals is considered inhumane by some; others feel that it is economically impractical. Glass says that most hunt clubs maintain their own kennels and breeding programs, and that the master of the hounds will destroy any puppy that appears defective. This controversial, if one commonplace, practice of culling is still practiced by other breeders of hunting and stock dogs, and sometimes of show animals, on the grounds that neither they nor anyone else should be burdened with an unsound dog.

Some animal-rights advocates argue that breeds with severe problems, like the shar-pei, breeds unable to whelp naturally, like the bulldog and the Boston terrier, and the tiny toy breeds that are unable to live normal lives should be eliminated or modified. "We must address the ethical issue of whether we can continue to create mutant animals for our own ego gratification," Michael Fox, of the Humane Society, says. Behavioral and temperament defects, and so correcting one set of problems can be expected to help restore the overall health of many animals.

One way to effect reform would be to ban the registration and reproduction of dogs with problems. Recently some clubs have urged their members and those who buy dogs from members to agree to a "restricted" transfer, stipulating that the dog will be bred only after it has reached one or even two years of age, and is certified free of defect by a veterinarian. At that time, if the dog cannot be certified, the seller will replace it. The offspring of dogs with restrictions on their pedigree would not be registered. Without opposing such non-breeding contracts outright, AKC officials say that a dog with a restriction cannot be shown because it is not, technically, breeding stock. Since many AKC Champions win their title before they

are a year old, the policy makes the restricted transfer anathema to people wanting to compete. (The OFA deems even a nine-year-old dog too young to certify for normal hips.)

Sometimes the AKC's structure and internal politics have become impediments to reform, as breed clubs and the national leadership have vied over policy. A case in point involves the dalmatian.

Nearly a decade ago Robert H. Schaible, who was then a geneticist at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis, reported on an experiment he had conducted to free the dalmatian from a recessive genetic defect (associated with deafness, a skin problem, and urinary stones) that can result in death and excessive medical expense. He crossed a dalmatian with a closely related English pointer, which is unaffected, and then immediately bred back to dalmatians. After five generations the defect-free backcrossed dogs were indistinguishable from purebred dalmatians.

The AKC board approved registration of the back-crossed dogs in February of 1981. Then-president William Stifel wrote in the official Gazette, in April of 1981: "If there is a logical, scientific way to correct genetic health problems associated with certain breed traits and still preserve the integrity of the breed standard, it is incumbent upon the American Kennel Club to lead the way." The board's decision might have set the stage for other dramatic actions to improve the health and welfare of dogs. But members of the Dalmatian Club of America objected that the purity of their breed was being compromised and forced cancellation of the registration. John Patton, of Washington University, says "The Dalmatian Club action shows the ludicrous politics of the AKC, in which dogs suffer. They'd rather have their animals die than get rid of a disease. Genetically you couldn't tell the difference between those dogs and dalmatians." AKC officials say they had no choice but to honor the wishes of the majority of the Dalmatian Club of America that they not register the crosses. But critics contend that the board simply bowed to misinformed protest and has since then declined to press the case--through education or action. The AKC is more intent on avoiding conflict with its member clubs, they say, than on working to improve the lot of purebred dogs. The truth may lie between. Marden says the board is willing to work with the clubs and cites its decision to allow the incorporation of basenjis from Africa, judged purebred on the basis of appearance and place of origin, into American bloodlines. However, the decision appears not to reflect a formal policy change, especially with regard to registering crossbred dogs.

For many sportsmen and faddists, the dog has become little more than equipment for a game. They justify the game in the name of freedom, arguing that no organization or governmental body has the right even to recommend and changes in their approach, despite its destructiveness, and the AKC has endorsed their ideology through word and policy. Its ability to change direction is now being put to the test.

The necessary course ahead, as many animal-rights advocates and dog-lovers see it, involves the acceptance of a more expensive and traditional definition of purebred dogs, which recognizes their essential characteristics as herders, hunters, and companions, as intelligent and uniquely talented creatures, not as objects of beauty alone.

Finding a Dog

Despite claims of genius for the border collie--a current rage--no breed of dog is perfect, free of genetic and behavioral problems, superior in every talent. Some that are robust and intelligent may not be especially social, and within every breed individual lines and dogs will vary markedly. A poorly bred border collie can be as temperamentally unsound and as dumb as a cocker spaniel. A well-bred German shepherd can be unsurpassed. And a poor environment and improper socialization can turn even the best-bred dog into a terror.

That said, a few observations and tips might help people seeking a canine companion of sound mind and body.

- Avoid extremes in size and appearance--the giant breeds are short-lived; toys tend to be fragile and sickly; short-nosed breeds have respiratory problems. No rule says that the only suitable apartment dogs are those under ten pounds (toys). Among companion dogs, the Cavalier King Charles spaniel (thirteen to eighteen pounds) is highly prized, but difficult to breed. Some terriers and nonsporting dogs also worth considering.

- For overall intelligence and versatility, look to the herding, hunting, and working dogs--retrievers, pointers, setters (except Irish), and some hounds; stock dogs, including the non-AKC border collies, Australian kelpies, Australian and English shepherds, Catahoula leopard dogs; a few of the terriers, like the Jack Russell, which, small and hardy, also often adapt to urban life better than larger breeds. Bred for work, these dogs require obedience training, proper socialization, and regular exercise, whether they live in an apartment or have access to a fenced yard. A poorly conditioned animal becomes bored, destructive, and sickly.
- Investigate thoroughly the characteristics of the type of dog (retriever, for example) that interests you and of the various breeds (Labrador, golden, Chesapeake Bay, flat- and curly-coated) in that type. Books are a good place to start, especially those that include to start, especially those that include discussions of potential health problems. The best sources for wisdom about dogs are breeders, trainers, and veterinarians, who can be found through area kennel clubs and animal shelters; dog owners; and participants in and judges at dog events--especially field trials and obedience tests.
- Having settled on a likely breed or two, seek a reputable breeder in your area who is producing dogs for their ability, not for appearance alone. You may have located several kennels through the previous step; if not, you can check the extensive and well-regarded classified advertising that appears in every issue of Dog World magazine. The American Kennel Club (51 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010) will refer people to local kennel and breed clubs. National rarebreed clubs (many of which advertise in Dog World) will do the same. Local classifieds are sometimes helpful as well.
- Select your dog from among those being bred for ability and temperament--whether you want the dog to perform a function or merely to serve as a pet. If you settle on an AKC-registrable puppy whose parents are AKC Champions, make sure that they performed well not just in the show ring but in obedience or field trials as well.
- When you go to see a litter, always ask to see the dam, and the sire and grandparents if possible. These animals give you a hint of how the grown puppy will appear and behave. Observe the puppy that interests you for as long as possible, to see how it interacts with people and its litter mates. The puppy should be at least six and preferably seven or eight weeks old.
- For all large and medium-size breeds, make sure the parents and preferably also the grandparents, are certified free of hip dysplasia by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, the only agency in the country that evaluates the hips of dogs. Even if you are interested in a small dog, such as the Cavalier King Charles spaniel, you may want to make sure its parents are OFA certified, because many of these breeds are dysplastic too. Do not take the breeder's word on the soundness of his or her dogs' hips unless you are ready to risk finding out that your two-year-old pet is partly crippled. (The OFA will not certify a dog under two years of age.) Similarly, question the breeder about other genetic abnormalities and problems with the breed and his or her line. Rigorous investigation is essential when dealing with backyard breeders.
- If the answers are not satisfactory, or the puppy seems not quite right, walk away from the deal--not an easy thing to do, but one that saves heartache later.
- Often only the most popular AKC breeds are available locally; sometimes you can find a stray litter of a rare dog, but little else. If you are fixated on a particular breed and on finding the best dog possible, you should be willing to travel, wait, and pay. To breeders command top dollar and may have waiting lists. They also will interview buyers and may refuse to sell to those they don't believe will care properly for a dog. A local kennel owner or trainer can be commissioned to assist you in finding a dog, or you can deal with a reputable kennel by phone and mail. But you may be better off changing to a different breed if you can't find any suitable specimens of your first choice locally.
- Make sure in buying a dog from any source that you are given the proper registration material if it is purebred, and a guarantee specifying that you can take the dog to a veterinarian for examination and if the dog is found defective, it will be replaced or your money refunded. In some states, such as New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, this guarantee is required by law. (These warranties can expire before a problem like hip dysplasia or even parvovirus, a killer of puppies, becomes manifest.

But they are better than nothing.) Better yet, if dysplasia is the worry, accept a restricted transfer, which will protect you until the dog can be certified free of the condition at two years of age.

- Do not buy a puppy from a pet store. Its origins are uncertain, its health and temperament suspect.
- A sound alternative to a purebred is a mongrel. Although the practice is anathema to many people in the purebred-dog world, people around the country are crossbreeding dogs to cure defects or simply to create a hybrid more healthy and vigorous than either pedigreed parent. Local kennel clubs and veterinarians should be able to tell you who some of these breeders are.

Besides deliberate first-generation crosses, of course, there are accidental mixes, common mutts, which can be more healthy, even-tempered, intelligent, and enjoyable than purebreds. In picking a mongrel you should exercise as much caution as with a purebred. Remember that without knowing what kinds of dogs the parents are, it is nearly impossible to guess what the mature dog will look like.

Local animal shelters often have adoption programs, but sometimes they are so restrictive in determining where they will place their dog that it is easier to buy a purebred dog.

- People unable or unwilling to raise a puppy might consider an older dog. In addition to animal shelters, some local breed clubs sponsor rescue programs for abandoned purebred dogs, and some dog tracks help people adopt greyhounds unsuited or too old for racing which otherwise would be destroyed.
- Remember that a dog represents a large investment of time, emotion, and money, and will be a member of the household for ten years, more or less. Its selection warrants more than a passing fancy.