

Does the Pedigree Make a Difference?

By Melissa D. Newman, longtime breeder of English Setters under the Setter Ridge banner and the 2002 Breeder of the Year Award Sporting Group recipient

Pedigree does make a difference, but deciding whom to breed your bitch to can be a complex matter. Genotype (genetic constitution), phenotype (observable characteristics), ancestors and health clearances all play a factor.

Consider how you use pedigrees to help you decide to breed to a specific dog. In a pedigree, I look at each dog to evaluate the good attributes as well as the bad.

Line breeding is very important to stamp in type, movement, temperament and genetic inheritance such as hips, bites and hearing, as well as soundness, style, drive and showmanship. Line breeding, mating involving relatives other than parents and siblings, on similar pedigree (dog or dogs) not only gives you the best but can also give you the worst. So it is incredibly important to know what faults, weaknesses and strengths each dog typically produces. Breeding on pedigree alone is like shooting an arrow in the dark. It is very important to look at the phenotype of the dog you are considering breeding to as well as the phenotype of the parents and grandparents of the sire and dams pedigrees. Also research what each of those dogs have produced.

I have two stud dogs that are full brothers. They genetically have the same exact pedigree, yet they phenotypically look as different as they possibly could. Both produce great dogs. Yet they don't produce dogs that are at all alike. So, if you just breed to pedigree, you might end up with something totally different than you thought you were going to get.

Temperament, movement, birdiness, health, balance and drive are of utmost importance in our breeding program as we hunt and field trial our dogs. You must research the dogs in the pedigree to know what you are dealing with.

I believe in line breeding; however, occasionally we outcross to gain things that we need or to try to alleviate things we don't want in our line.

I like breeding grandfather, granddaughter, half brother/sister, uncle or niece. However, if you do this for too many generations, you will also double and quadruple on your weaknesses and then you need to outcross. Outcross to a dog that is strong where your line is weak. While you're at it, try not to pick up any new problems. This can be tricky depending on how strong and broad the gene pool is in your breed.

It takes three generations of line breeding on good fronts to constantly get good fronts. So we determine the dog or dogs in the pedigree that have good fronts. Then we breed back to those dogs or their progeny that can carry the good fronts. Also, a dog that has a good front may not necessarily produce it. It is always important to look at what each dog has produced in the past and to what type of bitches he was bred to.

It is easier to gain good heads, bone and size than it is to gain good front angulation. You may be able to pick up bone in one generation of out crossing (the mating of unrelated individuals of the same breed) if you breed to a dog that produces great bone or comes from a line that consistently has good bone.

Evaluating pedigrees before breeding is important in our breeding program. However, more importantly, we look at what the dogs in the pedigrees phenotypically look like and produce and what they genetically may produce. Researching the good is as important as researching the bad. We try to know as much as possible about the pedigrees that we breed into in order to get some idea as to what we will end up with. We concentrate on balance, movement, temperaments, birdiness, drive, type, the health of the dogs and what health clearances they may or may not produce.

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English Setter

Courtesy of Melissa D. Newman



Keeshond

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