

# The preservation of working dogs

WATCHING A PARADE of toy breeds at Crufts last year brought to my mind once again the indignity brought upon the noble domestic dog by the whims of man. Seeing the "working" breeds being "judged" made me think how so many of us have left the perpetuation of some of our favourite and much-respected breeds to the dictates of fanciers in what is no more than a beauty contest. Now, I am not against dog shows, quite the reverse. I enjoy them and realise their place in the dog-breeding world. Nor am I condemning breed-fanciers who, say, produce a show Lakeland terrier which is somewhat different from the broken-haired black-and-tan terriers of the Eskdale and Ennerdale pack. The show terrier is not intended to kill foxes and most Lakeland terriers are sold as pets, which if too much like hunt terriers, would kill every cat in their neighbourhood. But what I do deplore is the failure to breed to type and here I include the planned exaggeration of some physical feature to a degree not characteristic of the traditional breed concerned.

The renowned bull-dog, once our national symbol, gets less mobile, more muscle-bound and less healthy with each decade. His ancestors had to be lightning-fast or they would have been gored to death by the enraged bull. The Bedlington terrier, once famous as a ratter and rabbit-dog, now has "filbert-shaped" ears and a "pear-shaped" head and an increasingly less weather-resistant coat. The show English springer has a most beautiful head but is far too big and slow for field work. The show whippet has increasingly narrow shoulders and better developed hind-quarters than fore. No sight-hound with narrow shoulders is flexible enough to pick up a rabbit at speed. No animal which hunts using speed can be anything other than perfectly balanced, "fore and aft". The English setter, the flat-coated retriever and the cocker spaniel are used less and less in the field; Continental gundogs with speed, strength and robustness are replacing our traditional breeds.

Some breed associations or clubs have managed to produce a classification or standard for their breed which simply neither perpetuates the traditional breed nor leads to sensible line-breeding by the breed-fanciers. But added to this, a surge in popular demand for a particular breed, a fashionable trend in contemporary society or an influential breeder's whim can trigger off a sequence of events which eventually can almost lead to the destruction of a breed through irresponsible in-breeding or excessive line-breeding. Responsible bodies such as the Kennel Club and the British Small Animal Veterinary Association have tried to act in such cases but perhaps "too little, too late" is the epitaph here.

Dr Peter Bedford of the Royal Veterinary College, London, said recently that there were 24 breed-disposed ocular defects at which we must look closely. These defects are hereditary and cause pain and blindness. A recent survey showed that 70% of Shetland sheepdogs in Scotland had Collie Eye Anomaly (CEA). Even if only 5% of a breed are affected by a hereditary disease then surely a specialist veterinary investigation is needed before the breed is so infiltrated by the disease that it is impossible to breed away from it. Dr Harold Pearson, at the British Veterinary Association Congress of 1979, stated that breed defects must be recorded by breed clubs or associations through their members and this information transmitted for



For the future we want no diminution in the physical qualities and capabilities of our working dogs.

## D. Hancock

specialist advice on remedial action. This is the procedure in the USA.

We have therefore reached the stage, the quite appalling stage, in which pomeranians, Yorkshire terriers and poodles are prone to dislocating kneecaps; chows, boxers and poodles can suffer from intumed eyelids; alsations, labradors, chows, samoyeds, cockers and golden retrievers suffer from hip dysplasia (HD); long-haired miniature dachshunds, pekes and poodles are liable to distichiasis (double row of eye lashes); cockers, golden retrievers and poodles suffer from progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) — which covers a multitude of eye diseases all leading to the same effect, retinal dead tissue; Tibetan terriers and wire-haired fox terriers are prone to luxation of the eye lens (lens slipping out of place); bulldogs, pekes and boxers suffer from prolonged soft palate (which causes rattling in the throat); King Charles spaniels and red Irish setters get labial eczema (eczema of the lips), pekes get premature loosening of the teeth and toy spaniels get juvenile cataract. Veterinary certificates indicating freedom from congenital diseases are, of course, available but I am drawing attention to the situation which made them necessary. The whole question of the ethics of dog-breeding needs serious attention from all those concerned, at every level.

In attempting to eradicate such congenital conditions, undesirable even in purely commercial dog-breeding, the temperaments of some breeds have been undermined, with vicious unstable dogs resulting. But almost as regrettable is the urge of some breeders to exaggerate a physical feature in a breed to the detriment in the long term of the breed concerned. The "smashed" face of some breeds give the dogs themselves quite needless difficulties; all have whelping problems, bull-dogs suffer in hot weather, griffons have bronchial trouble, the boxer is prone to faint and have epilepsy, whilst the peke and the bull-dog have facial skin diseases all of their own. The bull-dog deserves a better fate; once longer-legged, faster and longer-muzzled, it is a breed needing reclassification if it is to survive. The dachshund, too, was never intended to be so very long-backed and so absurdly short-legged.

Regrettably too, the show bench enthusiasts have been permitted to over-emphasise the "beauty show" aspect and now working breeds for show differ markedly from the same breed working in the field. Compare the lean determined hardness of the field trials English setter such as the late Dr J.B. Maurice's Adare Nima or Downsman's Dracula with the slower heavier-headed show-bench equivalent such as Supreme Champions Wistaston School Scatbrair or Hurwyn Paper Doll. Look at the difference in leg-lengths between English springer spaniel field trials champion Farway Mac or Erin of Sandrig and show Supreme Champion Remington Rockin Red Wing.

The really excellent dual-purpose pointers bred at the Crookrise Kennels in Cumbria illustrate the way in which show and field requirements can be blended to produce fine-looking but still good working dogs. Champion Crookrise Flint, Best of Breed at Crufts in 1978, is the sire of many field trial winners. But even in the show arena, two different types of alsation seem to be developing, the so-called German type with the prominent roach back and the so-called British type with the excessive slope of back with steep or forward-placed shoulders. The show greyhound will in future have to feed off benches if shoulders in the breed get much narrower; some specimens already have to spread their forelegs to drink from a bowl of water on the ground. The breeding of pedigree dogs screams out for monitoring by those with some authority in the business.

But just how do you bring together all the interested parties concerned with one breed? The English Springer Spaniel Club and say WAGBI; the NCC or the South of England Coursing Club and the show Greyhound Club; the secretary of the show Beagle Club and the Chairman of the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles; the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and the Kennel Club — each has a different approach and mostly a different role to fulfill. But surely they all have one thing in common, the very best interests of the breed concerned. Each could play a different but a mutually-supporting role.

The breed associations are really in the best position to monitor congenital diseases, perhaps reporting direct to a sub-committee of the BSAVA. The breed standard is probably best laid down by those who use the breed "in the field" — the shooting men, the huntsmen, the coursing clubs and shepherds. The judging of working (and "sporting") breeds in dog shows could be done jointly by a working judge and a show judge for a while until common standards are established.

Perhaps what we really need is a new "superbody", the Association of Thoroughbred Working Dogs, with representation from all the parties concerned. Unless we establish some kind of body such as this, I fear for the future of many pedigree breeds, such as the cocker spaniel, the collie, the Irish setter, the fox terrier and the Bedlington terrier.

In the next decade too, we could see the "beautification" and subsequent degradation of the world-famous border collie and the much-valued genuine correct-sized Jack Russell terrier. It now needs a prominent and influential sportsman and dog-lover, or an organisation such as the BFSS, to pick up this particular gauntlet — it will not be a day too soon.