

# ARE WE PRODUCING PEDIGREE CHUMPS?

Gundogs are being ruined by show-breeding. It is time for performance to take precedence again. By David Hancock

**L**OOKING for a gundog puppy? Needing a new companion dog? If so, your choice may well be a pedigree dog, of known ancestry and, ideally, with a Cruft's champion in the line somewhere. But is that a safe bet anymore? Is success in the show-ring any sort of proof of quality? Are pedigree dogs being well bred? What are the experts saying?

"The next hundred years look rather bleak for the pure-bred dog industry unless dramatic changes are introduced. We have a problem which, if not addressed and speedily rectified, may destroy for all time many beautiful breeds of dog. All dog lovers share the blame for not acting..."



This strongly worded statement comes from a source not exactly renowned for seeking publicity or being prone to over-statement. It is one of the conclusions from a study into the current status of the pedigree dog by four distinguished veterinary surgeons at the Ontario Veterinary College. The situation which they highlight has arisen because, over the last hundred years or so, dogs have become valued not for what they can do, but for their appearance.

Pedigree dogs can now have distorted limbs, deformed heads, ears which drag on the ground, absurdly short legs, freak tails, sunken or protruding eyes, excessively long coats, superfluous teeth and over-wrinkled skin, and actually be desired because of these exaggerations. They can be mentally



unstable, brainless, savage and psychopathic, have a brief life-span, be carriers of some of the 300-plus inheritable diseases afflicting dogs and yet still be admired for just two assets: their cosmetic appeal and their pedigree. Such a fondness for disabled, useless animals would have astounded our sporting ancestors, who dedicated their lives, in many cases, to obtaining functional excellence in breeds of dog which subsequently became revered all over the world.

As far as the sporting breeds – gundogs, hounds and terriers – are concerned, this disturbing stage has been reached partly through today's sportsmen who have betrayed the responsibility passed down to them. They have lazily passed the buck to the Kennel Club. This despite the fact that as

**How well do cockers and Clumbers, purpose-bred for the task, now face thick bramble cover?**

early as 1906, William Arkwright, the massively authoritative pointer fancier, was writing that "degeneration in him [the pointer] was a necessary consequence of the methods of the Kennel Club. The interests of this body, ranging from lap-dogs to life-savers, were far too wide to permit its ever being a satisfactory legislator for the gundogs... For in a club like this, the shooting men must be in a minority, and laws will be passed that will spell ruin for sporting dogs."

Those gundog men who, as founder members of the Kennel Club, acted out of a desire to improve dogs, must be turning in their graves. No one seeking fine performance