

TO IMPROVE THE BREED

The French Bull Dog Club of America's Code of Ethics states, "I will breed a bitch only with the intent that this particular breeding will improve the breed." A worthy sentiment, but what does it really mean? That the breeder wants to improve conformation in her line; or to produce sound puppies and eliminate undesirable health problems or temperament issues; or some combination of these?

Is this a short-term goal in which this litter is expected to have improved conformation and/or health? Or is it a long-term goal, like an outcross to bring new genes into the mix, knowing that this litter may show considerable variation, but that in future breedings the breeder can try to "fix" the desirable traits in her line and avoid perpetuating any undesirable ones?

How many times have you heard people criticizing others for having bred a Frenchie with some undesirable conformational feature, or with less than "good" hips, or with a couple of hemivertebrae? And yet the people doing the criticizing might have bred dogs with terrible allergies, or bad temperaments, or several relatives with congenital heart defects simply because they had good hips or patellas.

Bear in mind that one does not breed a pair of hips, a topline, a bite, or patellas, but an entire animal. Assuming that there is no such thing as a Perfect French Bulldog (well, except for mine), a breeder must make informed and sensible choices, and despite her best intentions these choices sometimes turn out to have been the wrong ones. The trick is to learn from them and not repeat bad choices. Many health problems in Frenchies are "constitutional," being unwanted side effects of the breed's basic short-faced, chondrodystrophic dwarf structure. Others are either polygenic or are developmental defects with no significant genetic component. These are the things that make breeding decisions difficult, and probably the wisest course in breeding is to avoid breeding animals who have or carry known genetic problems that are painful, disabling, lethal, or costly in vet bills; and to breed dogs with less serious conditions only to individuals who do not have those problems, and only with considerable forethought and soul-searching.

In breeds with some single-gene recessive diseases, DNA tests are available that will identify normal 'carriers' of the undesirable gene, allowing a breeder to screen potential breeding stock. If an otherwise sound dog of good conformation is a normal carrier of a 'bad' recessive gene, but the breeder feels it has much to contribute to her breeding program, she may choose to breed it to a normal non-carrier, even though one would expect half the puppies from such a mating to be normal carriers as well (none would show the disease). Puppies resulting from such a breeding should be DNA tested and the carriers identified and spayed/neutered and sold as pets. This would be a breeding of a dog with a known undesirable gene, but would nevertheless be done with an intent to improve the breed while preventing the indiscriminate spread of the gene in question.

AKC Gazette
Sept. 2006 French Bulldog Breed Column