

## **Our position on pedigree dog welfare**

There is a wealth of scientific and other evidence to show that the welfare and quality of life of many pedigree dogs is seriously compromised as a result of established selective breeding practices.

The RSPCA's position on this serious issue is very clear, and was informed by the independent scientific report we commissioned on pedigree dog breeding: **Pedigree dog breeding in the UK: a major welfare concern?**

## **Background to the problem**

Most breeds of dogs were originally selected for particular purposes, such as hunting and guarding property or livestock. This means that when humans selected which dogs to breed from, they chose those which were best suited for the various roles required of them. For example, they selected dogs for their fitness, ability and utility.

Then in the relatively recent past, dog showing emerged as a popular hobby. Dogs began to be selected to emphasise their different physical features, such as short flat faces, folded skin, short legs or long backs. Specific breeds were recognised and competitions began.

The first official dog show was held in 1859 and the hobby has continued to grow until today. The UK Kennel Club now recognises over 200 breeds and there are over 400 breeds recognised worldwide.

## **The rules of pedigree dog registration and dog showing**

Nowadays, in order to enter dog shows such as Crufts, dogs have to:

- be pedigree dogs, that are registered with the Kennel Club
- conform to written breed standards

The RSPCA believes that both of these requirements lead to the serious health and welfare problems experienced by pedigree dogs.

For dogs to be registered as a pedigree, both their parents must be registered members of the same single breed. This means that dogs of different breeds have been bred separately for many years and new genetic material cannot normally be introduced.

For each breed of dog it recognises, the Kennel Club also sets a written 'breed

standard' which describes what a 'perfect' example of that breed of dog should look like. At dog shows such as Crufts, the judge must compare each dog against the breed standard to identify a winner that best matches this standard. In general, we believe that current breed standards focus primarily on what dogs look like rather than their health, welfare and temperament.

## Why is this a problem?

In order to win dog shows, pedigree dogs have been bred to emphasise certain physical features. Some features have become so extreme that they can cause pain and suffering, some make dogs prone to particular disorders, and some prevent them from behaving normally.

**A recent study showed that all of the 50 most popular dog breeds have some aspect of their body which can cause suffering.**

As a side effect of breeding of dogs of different breeds separately and the focus on breeding for appearance, there is a lack of genetic diversity within dog breeds. Such a lack of genetic diversity within a breed can increase the risk of inherited diseases.

**Research has shown that every breed of dog that is well studied is prone to a range of diseases.**

The RSPCA is extremely concerned that the welfare of many dogs, of numerous breeds, is compromised as a result of exaggerated physical features and/or inherited diseases in some cases for a large proportion or even all of their lives.

We believe that breeding for exaggerated physical features and the breeding of closely related dogs (for anything other than scientifically proven welfare reasons) is morally and ethically unjustifiable.

## Ways forward

The RSPCA believes that all those who breed dogs should prioritise health, welfare and temperament over appearance when choosing which animals to breed, in order to protect the welfare of both the parents and offspring.

We want to help potential puppy buyers to only choose puppies that have been bred to have the best possible chance of being fit, healthy and happy and well suited to the lives they will lead, the vast majority of them as family pets. Our Get Puppy Smart campaign provides lots of useful information for anyone thinking of getting a puppy.

## **Working together to protect pedigree dogs**

We think that all those who benefit from dogs have a collective responsibility to work together to ensure that the health and welfare of pedigree dogs is protected.

This includes breeders, kennel club associations, the vet profession, companies producing veterinary products, pet insurers, the pet food industry and pet owners as well as the Advisory council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding.