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About the Author

Jeanne Cook began showing dogs and teaching all-breed obedience classes in 1977. She obtained championship and obedience titles and judged match conformation and obedience. She established her “Legendary” kennel name in 1983, writing nationally published articles on temperament, socialization, training and health screening. Jeanne established national health registries for Mastiffs (vWD in 1988 and thyroid in 1991). She enjoys leisure time with her Doberman “Maudie”. Employed full-time as a legal assistant at a Denver law firm, she teaches private and group all-breed obedience classes, and organizes K-9 health testing events. She has published *A Smart Buyer’s Guide To A Healthy Puppy* (© 2005) (previously *America’s Puppy Buying Revolution*) and Colorado’s Health Testing Breeders (All-Breed Directory) (© 2005-2006). You can contact Jeanne at Black Dobe LLC, 303-548-3238, jeannecook99@yahoo.com www.legendary.ws.

WHAT WILL YOU BE LEAVING BEHIND?

by Jeanne Cook of BLACK DOBE LLC

“Healthier puppies through health screening – a litter at a time”

I recall a sign I saw on field day with my children at a local park that read “Take only memories – leave only footprints”. What “foot prints” will you be leaving in your breed? How do you want to be remembered? Most people are in a breed for 5 years. Whether 5 years or 40, will people be appreciating your contributions or condemning the damage you left?

When I began in Mastiffs in 1977, few people were doing any health testing/screening at all. In 1974, 21 Mastiff hip x-rays were submitted to OFA (28.6% Abnormal). I followed the lead of Golden Retriever and Labrador Retriever clubs and I tested sire and dam before they were bred (hips, eyes, vWD and Brucellosis). I CERF eye examined and vWD tested my litters of puppies before sale. I tested before I bought and before I sold. I didn’t always get clean results. But I discovered who I should not include in my breeding program and moved on to a healthier generation. One time in particular I shipped in a beautiful top price show quality puppy who quickly became a half price pet the next week after his CERF eye exam revealed an eye problem that I could not breed in good conscience. I found that health screening could make a difference. I started encouraging hip x-rays and CERF eye exams and writing articles to promote awareness. I organized the first CERF eye clinic at the Mastiff Club of America national specialty in 1987 with 23 Mastiffs participating. I established national health registries for Mastiffs (vWD in 1988 and thyroid in 1991). In the 1990’s we discovered that some popular studs (without CERF eye exam clearances) were passing on Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) to their puppies. (They were also not CERF examining their puppies before sale). The offspring were becoming totally blind at 2, 3, 4 years of age (after obtaining their championships, being bred and passing PRA on to their own litters of puppies).

Money was finally raised and enough research was done which resulted in a (breed specific) DNA test for Mastiffs which can tell a breeder if a puppy (at 8 weeks old) will ever have PRA.

In my other breed, Doberman Pinschers, health testing has led to another important advancement. Dobermans have a problem with von Willebrand disease (an inherited bleeding disorder which can be fatal). Doberman vWD statistics are only 25% clear, 49% carrier and 26% affected (January 2004 VetGen report)¹. Now the breeder can do a one-time DNA test to determine if a Doberman Pinscher puppy is clear, carrier or affected before the litter is sold.

Many dedicated breeders have been health testing Mastiff through the years. OFA statistics² are:

OFA Hip x-rays: 1986: 103 (25.2% Abnormal) 1995: 451 (21.1% Abnormal)
2004: 529 (18.0% Abnormal)

OFA Cardiac: 1996: 37 resulted in 2.7% Abnormal. 2006: 209 resulted in 0.5% Abnormal. (Note that cardiac clearances don't clear them forever like a DNA test does - it just means they see no evidence at this point.)

OFA Thyroid: 1997: 49 = 8.2% Abnormal. 2005: 128 = 0.8% Abnormal.

OFA Patellas: 1999: 94 = 1.1% Abnormal. 2005: 180 = .6% Abnormal.

OFA Elbows: We discovered that too small of a sampling could sometimes give us a false sense of security: 1990 8 elbow x-rays sent to OFA which showed 100% Normal. However, further testing revealed that in 1992, 24 elbow x-rays showed that 29.2% were Abnormal. 1998: 360 sent in (18.1% Abnormal). 2005: 414 15.9% Abnormal.

CHIC (Canine Health Information Center) added 231 Mastiffs to its program in 2001 (by going back in time to list all Mastiffs that met the criteria). There have been additions since then (33 in 2002, 57 in 2003, 62 in 2004, 69 in 2005, 80 in 2006 and 23 (so far) in 2007 for a total of 555. CHIC requirements for Mastiffs are hips, elbows, eyes and cardiac (with autoimmune thyroiditis and cystinuria optional). It is important to note that a CHIC number does not necessarily mean that all of the dog's testing was all clear – just that the dog *has been tested* for the specified requirements.

It began with a handful of health screening breeders and owners and grew over the years. Buyers can now expect Mastiffs, and their puppies, to be tested before breeding and sale. It is routine. The website of the Mastiff Club of America illustrates their *continued* dedication to health testing. In an effort to produce better dogs, breeders and owners have submitted 185,781 Labrador Retrievers' hip x-rays, and 113,858 Golden Retrievers' hip x-rays to the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, just to name a couple.³ Why not jump in and participate now so that breeders in the future can benefit from your desires to better your breed. Smart breeders can use this research to their advantage. And if you don't submit results to OFA, people in the future can't benefit from your information. The Mastiff PRA problem was a perfect example of the permanent damage that can be done to a breed. Stud fees are quickly spent but the generations of our beloved breeds go on and on.

Now I organize health testing/screening events for all breeds. So one person **can** make a difference. How will you be remembered? What "foot prints" will you be leaving?

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