

Accepting the Unacceptable

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Can you think of a statement you can make around any "dog" person, at any time, and feel assured that it will meet with no resistance? I can think of only one, and that is "There is no such thing as a perfect dog." Assuming I am correct in my hypothesis, the next logical thought would be "Since there is no such thing as a perfect dog, what will I accept as less than perfect in my dog?" Everyone has a different place where they draw the line, and it is those very differences which account for most of the discussions and disputes among dog fanciers.

Quite literally, there are countless combinations of flaws or faults which can appear in any given dog. Presented here are six hypothetical dogs with varying pros and cons. The object is to provide some food for thought as to where your own bottom line is. Which faults will you tolerate and which ones do you emphatically turn away from? If none of the following dogs seem realistic to you, create some of your own combinations - but, be honest. Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect dog.

With that in mind, let's look at the following specimens as though you are attempting to either buy a new show dog or select a stud dog. Here are your choices:

1. Dog A-- Pros: Outstanding temperament; good tailset and topline. Cons: Badly cow-hocked in rear; family medical history of Legg's Perthes disease.
2. Dog B-- Pros: Good topline, tailset and rear. Cons: Serious temperament problems; front goes east and west; unable to get any straight answers concerning family medical history.
3. Dog C--Pros: Flashy, showy temperament; nice high tailset; beautiful side gait. Cons: Large dip in topline; crosses in front coming at you; family history of epilepsy.
4. Dog D--Pros: Beautiful head with long neck; good tailset; clean front and rear. Cons: Bad temperament; roached topline; sire had megasophagus as a puppy and outgrew it.
5. Dog E--Pros: Great temperament; beautiful topline and tailset; good, sound, front. Cons: Coarse head with thick neck; badly down in pasterns; weak rear; no family medical history available.
6. Dog F--Pros: Great temperament, topline and tailset; lovely headpiece with good length of neck; deep red color. Cons: Long in body; single tracks when going away from you; family history of slipping patellas.

OK, I know what you are thinking - these examples are too extreme - but, are they really? Mull over in your mind the myriad number of faults and medical problems which have not even been mentioned here. In you mind's eye, critically evaluate each dog you own. Write down the description of each of your dogs using the pro and con method. Assuming you never have to show your paperwork to another human being, be ruthlessly honest. What have you got? On each of your dogs there will be some "cons". That is where you "drew the line" in the past. Are your guidelines changing? Are you breeding only to enhance the quality of the breed? Hopefully, you are. Hopefully, the longer you are in the breed the more discriminating you will be. Always bear in mind, what may be acceptable to you may be totally unacceptable to another, and vice versa. Ideally we are all striving to produce offspring that come as close to the Breed Standard as possible. However, many of the "cons" in dogs A through F are not mentioned in the Breed Standard - but they do exist. They exist in our backyards, our kennels, our living rooms and our show rings.

Most importantly, remember that your "bottom line" should never be static. As you breed out faults and flaws, you should be ever drawing closer to breeding that elusive "Perfect Dog"