

Dr Malcolm Willis responds

to

The Kennel Club

Uniquely the Kennel Club has brought in certain punishments against the German Shepherd breed, for example the withdrawal of CCs, but has brought in no such ruling against other breeds with arguably more serious problems. It is astonishing that suddenly, out of the blue, the KC brings in stringent rules affecting GSD based largely upon a TV programme of dubious merit. One could question the legality of what the KC are doing, but more importantly one must question the wisdom, or rather the lack of it. The biggest problem in the GSD breed is not necessarily unsound action, but it is the registration of inferior dogs and the use for breeding of inferior dogs. The word “inferior” refers to the whole dog in structure, character etc. At this moment in time the GSD world, in the main, is supporting KC schemes in taking action against poor hips, poor elbows and in haemophilia testing.

The GSD fraternity, more than any other breed, has pioneered hip dysplasia screening, but this fact is ignored by the KC. In terms of hips, what is needed is not just a scheme but the KC meaningful support of such a scheme. We need to have specific rules and regulations concerning HD, in that certain values should be used to prevent breeding. Initially, we should begin by insisting that all breeding stock are hip scored and once this is in process, we should develop regulations which should be amended to ban the breeding of dogs above specific scores. This regulation could be applied to other breeds. It is important to stress here that there are ten or more, worse breeds, than German Shepherd Dogs, in terms of mean hip score.

It makes no sense to insist on rules about soundness when the KC is allowing registrations of dogs that are unscored, and that may be deficient in character and inferior in shape. Unsoundness is a general term which is variable in interpretation, according to who you are talking to. The GSD breed has introduced and supported breed surveys for some years. This technique attempts to identify the best animals and then endorse their use in breeding. It considers quite correctly that this is far and away the most accurate assessment of breeding stock. Sadly there is no support nor acknowledgement of this from the KC. Within the breed, many leading breeders do their own culling on hips. I can think of several dogs, over the years, which have had successful show careers, yet because of high hip scores, they have never been bred from. Compared with many other breeds, the GSD owners/breeders/exhibitors are more knowledgeable than in many other breeds.

It is perhaps true to say that many all rounder judges do not support the correct type of German Shepherd Dog. Why not, when it is recognised universally? This country is out of step and considered the “poor relation” with the rest of the GSD world and the KC is doing nothing to get us back into step. The “Alsatian” which is recognized here and virtually no where else, appears to be supported and lauded by the Kennel Club. If our governing body really wanted to help the GSD breed advance, they would penalise this type of dog.

Unsoundness can be caused by a variety of things, including the way in which animals are reared. There is certainly no evidence to support the view that unsoundness is caused by HD. Some dysplastic dogs are

unsound and some are perfect examples of soundness, if this were not the case, why would we bother to x-ray our dogs? If one could tell the hip status by looking at individual dog, one would not need to hip score. Many years ago in our Bernese Mountain Dog breeding, we bred a bitch that 44/44. She was of correct type and perfectly sound/true in movement; in fact she won her Stud Book Number! Her dam had very unsound rear action and a 3/3 hip score.

In my considered opinion, soundness could be improved more rapidly by the compulsory adoption of breed surveying and by a very strict screening of judges who are given authority to judge GSDs. The existence of two types of GSD is brought about by the Kennel Club permitting judges to award CCs when they should not even be judging the breed at all. The GSD Breed Council has an examination system which attempts to sieve out and remove incompetent judges, but the KC allow people to bypass, it by approving and sanctioning those to judge this breed who have no talent for it and not passed any recognised examinations. Why do the Kennel Club not support and endorse the Breed Council in their excellent endeavour to educate judges? It makes a mockery of criticising soundness if the judges who officiate could, themselves, be described as “unsound”. The Kennel Club would be better employed looking at the way dogdom is run across all breeds rather than by imposing petty penalties on a breed which has contributed more than most.

The issue of double handling is somewhat different but it is not confined to this breed alone. It can take many forms, from blatant and dangerous running around the ring to discrete coughing in the corners of ring. The GSD people in the main are passionate about their breed; very few have other breeds or watch other breed judging. They travel to Germany and other European centres and see the controlled freedom that is allocated to their fellow breeders. The GSD people see year after year, the merit and satisfaction in striving for excellence in both breeding and working potential. They see also the results of breeding top quality animals, strict controlling of breeding schemes, the value in breed wardens, the prowess in expertise of knowledgeable breed judges, who are able to give valuable and important verbal critiques, which are not only valuable on the day, but written critiques which follow, are educational. Regrettably the KC in this country appears to frown upon verbal critiques as being time consuming. Could it be that they are actually beyond the capabilities of some judges and thus we are all excluded because of the ignorance of a few?

One can hardly blame the GSD fraternity for trying to emulate the SV system in the UK. The SV allows and encourages breeders to produce and exhibit the best in the world and that Mecca is where all respected, knowledgeable GSD people strive to be. The KC should sit down with the GSD leaders and seek to understand what they are trying to achieve, instead to imposing petty rules and allowing other more serious issues to go unchallenged.

Dr Malcolm B Willis 9th February 2010