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The Breeders: curious facts about dog breeding

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Rebel Collies

Border collie breeders have long opposed recognition of their breed by the American Kennel Club (AKC). Unlike many dog breeds, border collies have always been bred for their ability to perform a specific task--namely, herding livestock. Border collie breeders have argued that the AKC would emphasize the breed's appearance at the expense of its working traits. The AKC voted in 1994 to recognize border collies, but today the United States Border Collie Club (USBCC) urges border collie breeders not to provide their dogs' breeding records to the AKC. Further, the USBCC recommends that breeders who sell puppies require the buyers to sign contracts forbidding them to register their puppies with the AKC.--*Damian Chadwick*



AmeriKKKan Kennel Club

From its headquarters in New York City, the American Kennel Club (AKC) sets the rules and regulations, certifies the judges, and publishes the results of competitions sponsored annually by its affiliates. For a fee, it records the offspring of all AKC-registered parents in its stud book and provides them with official certificates of pedigree. Its best-selling *Complete Dog Book* contains photographs and details on the 150 currently recognized breeds and ignores the remaining 250 or so that exist in the world today.

"AKC information and shows create a market and demand for purebred dogs," says Alan Stern, the AKC's vice-president of communications. Dogs represent a \$17 billion-dollar industry in the United States, and much of that money is spent on purebred animals, especially those boasting AKC-recognized bloodlines (roughly half of those eligible). So dominant is the AKC that even those breeders choosing to remain outside its aegis must define themselves and their dogs in relation to it. Consumers wanting non-AKC purebreds are hard-pressed to even find

them.

Despite its wealth and power, the AKC has come under fire from an increasing number of critics who charge that it has sometimes done purebred dogs irreparable harm. The arguments of these veterinarians, breeders, trainers, and animal-rights advocates focus on three interrelated areas. First, the AKC determines quality in a dog primarily on the basis of appearance, paying scant heed to other canine characteristics. Second, because it benefits financially from the registration of dogs, the AKC has failed to take a stand against the puppy mills and pet stores that exploit purebred dogs. It will neither refuse to register those animals--although many dogs, produced and sold under inhumane conditions, are of questionable pedigree and genetic fitness--nor cooperate with authorities seeking to regulate them. The result has been a decline, which even the AKC recognizes, in the quality of the animals that Americans buy from retailers each year. Third, the AKC and its member clubs define purity in a breed according to an outmoded notion that can destroy the health of the dogs. Unquestioning obedience to this notion has led the AKC to make arbitrary decisions regarding which breeds to recognize, to take no stand on the rescue of rare dogs, and to ignore the proliferation of inheritable canine diseases. (Adapted from Mark Derr, *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1990.)

Dalmatian Club

Nearly a decade ago, Robert H. Schaible, who was then a geneticist at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis, reported on an experiment he had conducted to free the dalmatian from a recessive genetic defect (associated with deafness, a skin problem, and urinary stones) that can result in excessive medical expense and death. He crossed a dalmatian with a closely related English pointer, which is unaffected, and then immediately bred back to dalmatians. After five generations the defect-free, back-crossed dogs were indistinguishable from purebred dalmatians. The AKC board approved registration of the back-crossed dogs in February of 1981. But members of the Dalmatian Club of America objected that the purity of their breed was being compromised and forced cancellation of the registration. AKC officials say they had no choice but to honor the wishes of the majority of the Dalmatian Club, and they did not register the crosses. (From Mark Derr, *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1990.)

The Gene Police: Leon Whitney

The connection between [eugenics](#) and animal breeding was often indirect. But eugenicists would frequently refer to human "pure breeds," "thoroughbreds," and "mongrelization"--and compare those deemed unfit to barnyard animals. Leon Whitney, a widely respected eugenicist in the 1930s, moved in both circles, writing numerous books on how to breed "superior" humans and dogs. In his book *The Case for Sterilization*, Whitney argued that the U.S. needed to sterilize some 10 million of its

own citizens and that the world would be better off if a quarter of the global population were neutered. Hitler requested a copy of Whitney's book and wrote him a personal letter of admiration after reading it. In 1933, Whitney offered lavish praise for Hitler's eugenic programs in *Birth Control Review*, the journal published by Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger. (Adapted from Jonah Goldberg, *National Review*, 2/13/02)

Sick Pup

In 1987 a reporter for *Parade* asked William F. Stifel, then the president of the AKC, whether the AKC would register a blind, deaf, three-legged purebred pup with hip dysplasia and green fur. According to *Parade*, Stifel said, "We would register the dog. AKC [registration] unfortunately does not mean quality." (From Mark Derr, *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1990.)

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