

Thoughts on Breeding Your Standard Schnauzer Bitch: A Potential Breeder's Checklist

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A Prospective Breeder

The checklist presented in this paper offers some considerations and thoughts prior to breeding your standard schnauzer bitch. Breeders strive to produce the best possible litter by carefully addressing health, conformation and temperament. As a breeder, a critical evaluation of a bitch must be done first for the next generation. What traits does the bitch possess to compliment the breeding? What are her strong points? What needs improvement? Is it structure, coat, temperament, height or type? The bitch is part of a family in a pedigree. Knowing your dam's family: the strong points and not-so-strong points is essential for the next generation. Look at her littermates and her dam's littermates. Is there a pattern for the traits you either want to build upon or not reproduce?

For a successful breeding, one must be diligent and understand basic breeding genetics. It is best to write your goals for the prospective breeding, so you have a map... a definite plan about how to proceed, complete with all the knowledge you can acquire about the "family" of both your dam and the prospective sire's family you are going to breed into. Your breeding is three dimensional. *You are not just breeding to a stud dog, but to his family. Further, your bitch's family has significant influence on what she produces.*

Talk to the breeder of your bitch. What choices were made to produce the bitch you own? What traits did your breeder like in that litter? Ask your breeder what is the next step for the new generation to keep the good traits and leave the undesirable traits behind. Use your breeder's knowledge of what worked and what did not.

Remember, not everything can be fixed in one generation. Plan breedings that hopefully will improve upon one or two traits, without losing the good already present. Work towards an ultimate goal over several generations.

Basic Questions to Answer When Breeding for The Next Generation

1. Can you objectively evaluate your bitch and her pedigree? Compared to the official breed standard: what are the bitch's strengths and weaknesses? There is no perfect dog. You need to identify traits that need to be improved as well as the traits you want to preserve. Ask yourself:
 - a. What are the bitch's three best traits?
 - b. What three traits need improvement?
2. Pedigrees
 - a. Can you read you bitch's pedigree and determine if she is line-bred, in-bred or out-crossed? Can you define each breeding method and know the genetic implications? (Orlandi, 2004).
 - b. Do you know the history of the grand-dam and grand-sire and what he/she has produced?
 - c. When breeding to a stud dog, the breeding is three dimensional: You are breeding to a family of dogs: not just one dog.
 - Do you know the health history, temperament, height, conformation qualities?

3. What are the goals of your prospective breeding: ask yourself some questions:
 - a. More body, better coat, layback of shoulder, more reach and drive, height, squareness, temperament, health, etc.?
 - b. Do you know genetically what can be changed in one generation and what cannot? What are your plans for traits that may require more than one generation to change?
 - c. Do you understand dominant and recessive genes?
 - d. Do you understand the term polygenetic?
4. Health should be at the top of the list.
 - a. How far into the pedigree can you trace health/structural issues that concern you?
 - b. Has all SSCA required testing been completed on your bitch and the stud dog you are considering?
 - c. What knowledge do you have on the siblings of the stud dog and prospective brood bitch? (www.ofa.org provides health testing information and a vertical pedigree of testing results.)
 - Health, temperament, size, structure, coat quality?
 - d. What if you choose frozen semen on a dog alive/or now deceased before the required health testing?
 - Testing can be done on frozen semen for Dilated Cardiomyopathy and DNA
5. **SSCA REQUIRED** health screenings
 - a. Hips clear of dysplasia
 - b. Eyes certified against disease,
 - c. Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)
 - i. Do you understand DCM Normal, DCM Carrier and DCM Affected?
 - ii. DCM Normal: Has two normal copies of the gene and can only pass a normal copy to a prospective offspring
 - iii. DCM Carrier: Has one normal copy and one mutated copy of the gene. This dog will not have the disease but can pass either a normal copy or a mutated copy to prospective offspring. To avoid breeding an affected puppy this dog must be bred to a DCM Normal mate.
 - iv. DCM Affected: has two mutated copies of the gene and is destined to develop clinical dilated cardiomyopathy disease.
 - d. The breeder is issued a Certified Health Information Center Number (CHIC #) for required testing. "For potential puppy buyers, the CHIC certification is a good indicator the breeder responsibly factors good health into their selection criteria" (www.ofa.org).
 - e. For available health clinics go to www.ofa.org, click Health clinics in the header
6. **SSCA/OFA recommended, but optional** health screenings
 - a. Autoimmune Thyroiditis
 - b. Cardiac evaluation
 - i. Congenital cardiac exam by cardiologist
 - ii. Advanced cardiac exam by cardiologist
 - iii. Basic cardiac exam by cardiologist
 - c. DNA Bank for future testing and research

7. The stud dog.
 - a. Health cleared
 - b. Information on his siblings
 - c. Information on his dam and her siblings
 - d. Information on his sire and his siblings
 - e. Does this stud dog carry the traits you need for your bitch?
 - i. Are those traits dominant or recessive? (very important to know)
See (Orlandi, 2004; Battaglia, 1884; Seranne, 1980).

Closing Thoughts

After doing all the homework and producing a litter, evaluate what worked well and where there still needs improvement or anything that may have been a surprise. Use what you have learned to plan for the next generation/litter. A breeder can make a positive contribution to the breed that we all love and care deeply about by *researching, careful planning, and honest evaluation*.

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