



Media Release

From Victorian Canine Association Inc
trading as DOGS Victoria

22 August 2008

Pedigreed Dogs Do Make the Best Pets

Dog owners the world over have been buzzing with the recent show on the BBC, also posted on youtube and followed up by channel SBS, calling into question the ethics and practices of purebred dog breeders in Australia.

Golden Retrievers were particularly singled out by a representative of the Australian Veterinarian Association (AVA) who implied the breed has hip problems more prolifically than other types of dogs and is particularly prone to Hip Dysplasia. In truth, Golden Retriever breeders throughout Australia have been working to lower the incidence of joint problems through very careful and strict breeding regulations.

Golden Retrievers, both male and female, must be tested for hip soundness prior to mating. The test was developed and continues to be implemented by the AVA. It is simple to read; the lower the number, the better the score: 0 is perfect, 106 the worst.

In 1993 the average Golden Retriever hip score in Australia was 16.1, with the median at 13. In 2001, thanks to careful screening and ethical breeding, the average was 12.7 with a median of 11. The average hip score for all years from 1993 – 2001 was 15.3 with a median of 12, with more up to date figures due to be released shortly.

“Recommendations under the AVA/ANKC hip scheme are for no parent to have a combined hip score greater than the breed average over time (currently 15.3) and no individual hip worse than half the breed average,” said Golden Retriever Club of Victoria President, Shane Addison, “and we know that by committing to this recommendation each generation will be less prone to Hip Dysplasia than the last. No heritable disease can be eradicated overnight, which is why we have a strict long-term breeding program that is guided by the collection of ongoing statistical data.

Although not required, most Golden Retriever breeders in Australia also test for potential eye and heart defects. Animals that do not meet all health requirements are desexed to remove them from the breeding program completely.”

Golden Retrievers are only one example of the way ethical, responsible breeders are working together to create healthier dogs that make better pets.

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The Australian National Kennel Council requires certain breeds to undergo heritable disease tests as a prerequisite to mating. Additionally, many breed clubs throughout Australia have their own required breeding practices determined from careful and ongoing scientific research.

“Yes, dogs of certain breeds are more prone to certain genetic problems,” said Peter Frost, President of DOGS Victoria, “but by facing the reality of those problems and developing responsible breeding programs, breeders of pedigree, purebred dogs are taking positive pro-active steps to eradicating the problems. Australian breeders go to extremes to import semen for artificial insemination as well as entire animals to ensure their breeding lines remain varied, strong and healthy.”

Too often, breeders of non-pedigreed dogs, crossbred dogs and so-called “designer” dogs do not test for heritable diseases. This isn’t because diseases don’t exist in these animals. It is simply because the genetic combinations make for an unknown risk of diseases. By choosing not to test for any disease, these breeders are turning a blind eye to potential problems and allowing them to continue to pass from one generation to the next in a sort of genetic lottery.

The major health problems seen in dogs across Australia, therefore, are not in the pedigree, purebred dogs.

DOGS Victoria has been working diligently with the state government to introduce groundbreaking new legislation last year that makes it an offence to sell or give away a dog with a heritable disease. They are continuing to work together to develop a code of practice and more specific guidelines for managing heritable disease and creating a future full of healthy, happy pets.

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