



Part of the Breed Strategy developed by the JBLC after feedback from Bearded Collie owners and breeders

Planning a Litter? Useful Information to help you select a sire....

Choosing the right stud dog is essential to successful dog breeding. Be sure to take your time and do your research. It is not a perfect science but here are some basic tips for choosing a stud dog.

In considering a suitable sire for your litter you will have no doubt drawn up a list of dogs whose type you admire and if he has already been used at stud, a dog which has sired puppies that appeal to you. Remember that some breeders endorse the pedigrees of their dogs so that they cannot be bred from without this restriction being lifted. You will need to take this into account when checking availability of any dog.

When trying to establish a shortlist, it is important to consider this potential sire in relation to your bitch:

- Be very honest when evaluating your own bitch
- Does the potential stud dog have strengths where she has weaknesses or vice versa?
- Utilise the Kennel Club's Mate Select* programme to check for Health Test results. You may also wish to look at Estimated Breeding Values (EBV's) for hip dysplasia to more effectively determine the genetic risk that each dog will pass this disease to its progeny.
- Utilise the Mate Select programme to run a 'test mating' to help you reflect on the 'COI' (Coefficient of Inbreeding)

You are unlikely to find a sire that is strong in everything that you would like to improve in your bitch so try to identify a few points that will help the sire and bitch complement each other as much as possible.

- Talk to the owners of the dogs you are considering and ask to go over their dog
- Ask the owners about the dogs temperament - is he easy to live with and good with other dogs for example?

From this you will probably draw up a short list and once you are serious about using one of these dogs, get in touch with their owner, but only contact real contenders.

- Approach these owners with more detailed enquiries (bearing in mind that owners will not appreciate a 'shotgun' approach and if they share and send you lots of information, it is only polite to let them know your final decision about their dog).

Good stud dog owners will be as open and honest, to the best of their knowledge, about their dogs' strengths as well as his weaknesses - no dog is absolutely perfect. When contacting owners, be very prepared to answer their questions about your bitch.

If you have not previously met the owners of your potential stud dog, they will probably want to meet you and your bitch and most certainly will want to ask questions about her.

- Your bitch should also have had the required health tests
- Always explain what you hope to achieve with the litter and when you plan to breed
- Do not simply assume they will say yes, instead ask them if they would consider allowing you to use their dog
- Be sure to give the stud owners an idea when your bitch will be coming into season as they will need advance notice to make sure both your schedules are aligned

These are some of the things you may wish to check and/or ask the owner (especially if you have not yet met the dog):

1. Has the dog had the relevant health tests for the breed?

- Has he been Hip Scored and what is the score? **(The dog must have at least been Hip Scored)**
- Has he undergone a KC/BVA eye test and when? (you could ask to see a copy of the certificate as this is not a test that is recorded in the Kennel Club Mate Select Programme)
- Has he undergone a DNA test for CEA? **Note:** Only tests done by Optigen are published by the KC - for tests undertaken by other laboratories you may wish to see a certified proof of the results.
- Has he been Elbow Scored and what is the score?

2. What is the dog like to live with?

- How would the owner describe his nature?
- Is he particularly lively and or noisy or is he quite relaxed?
- Is he generally happy and sociable or does he have any hang ups? (fear of noises, chasing cars)
- How is he around other dogs or animals?

3. Does the dog have any health issues?

- Obviously an unhealthy dog should not be available at stud but it is useful to know if the dog is prone to any particular problems such as recurrent ear infections, bowel problems eg recurrent diarrhoea and recurrent skin problems etc.
- You may wish to enquire when he last saw a Vet and what for?
- It is also useful to know if the dog has an umbilical hernia. Most umbilical hernias are probably inherited, although trauma can also be a cause. It is unwise to mate together two dogs with hernias.

For information: An umbilical hernia is an opening in the muscle wall of the abdomen where the belly button is located. It allows the abdominal contents to pass through the opening. Hernias can range in size from pea sized right through to golf ball sized and larger. Smaller hernias don't cause any problems but larger hernias can allow loops of intestine through causing them to become trapped, necessitating an operation and should be repaired before this happens.

4. To the best of the owners' knowledge - what is the health history of his family?

- Are his parents still alive, how old are they or how old were they when they died?
If the dogs parents are still young you may wish to enquire about his grandparents and other ancestors.
- Are there any health issues in his immediate family? Are his siblings all still alive and fit and well?
- Did his parents or grandparents or their siblings have any health issues?

Issues you may wish to consider are: Auto-Immune diseases eg SLO , Addisons disease, pemphigus, haemolytic anaemia, thrombocytopaenia; hypothyroidism; forelimb lameness; premature sight loss; premature arthritis; undershot or overshot jaws; canines not clearing; chronic bowel problems and recurrent skin problems.

5. If the dog already has offspring, has he produced any health issues in them?

Issues you may wish to consider are: umbilical hernias, one or both testicles undescended in male offspring, hip or elbow dysplasia, auto-immune diseases, hypothyroidism; premature sight loss;

premature arthritis; undershot or overshot jaws; canines not clearing; chronic bowel problems and recurrent skin problems.

6. How many litters has the dog produced?

- Ask how many litters the dog has had - and how many in the last twelve months? The JBLC Breed Strategy gives advice on the number of times a sire can be used per year. This is based on the most recent figures for breed registrations and is currently two litters per year. This helps to prevent a genetic bottleneck and allows time for any health issues in either the sire or his puppies to be identified before he has had lots of litters.

Remember just because a dog does have a relative with a health issue or has produced a puppy with a health problem this does not mean that he should not be used. Obviously it would be inadvisable to double up on a health issue, so if you know that your bitch also has the same issue in her recent pedigree that is not the dog for you. Also if a dog has produced a problem in pups bred from bitches to a similar line to yours you may wish to reconsider. Likewise if a dog has repeatedly produced a problem in puppies from a variety of lines you should think very hard about using him.

7. Some other points to consider:

- **Don't just focus on big winners.** Handlers and advertising can make a top dog out of a mediocre one. At the same time, don't get caught up in the "hidden treasure" syndrome, in which you think you've discovered an unknown, perhaps un-shown, dog that nobody else has noticed. Judge him as objectively as you would the big winner, without excuses.
- **Check out the Co-efficient of Inbreeding (COI).** The KC Mate Select programme has a section for proposed matings where you can calculate the COI of any prospective litter. This is a very good way of estimating how inbred any puppies you breed would actually be. A smaller COI indicates less inbreeding. Look at the average COI for the breed and try to produce a litter with a lower one if possible, otherwise look at the COI of your bitch and try to produce pups with lower COI's than hers.
- **All else being equal, choose a less-used sire over a popular sire.** If you plan to breed subsequent generations, your dogs will be more valuable to the breed if they do not carry the same genes that are swamping the breed's gene pool.
- **Consider Using an Older Dog Rather Than a Younger One.** An older dog will have reached maturity and any inherited age-related health issues are more likely to have manifested themselves whereas in a younger dog, the chances are they have not. Any health issues in their puppies will also have had more chance to come to light. The downside to using an older dog is their sperm count or quality may be lower than a younger dog.

Once you have decided on the dog you wish to use and it has been agreed with his owners, it is important before the mating to agree a stud fee and whether any return mating due to pregnancy failure is free or not. If a tie has occurred during the mating, in most cases you will have to pay again for the studs services. If at all possible this should be in writing and signed by both parties thus avoiding any future confusion.

As soon as your bitch comes into season inform the owner of the stud dog to give them a rough idea of when your bitch might be coming to visit their dog.

If you have chosen a stud dog a fair distance away from home, and you are not leaving the bitch with the stud owner, be prepared for return trips, bitches are not always regular and if she is not ready it just won't happen. Be patient - the dogs usually need time to get familiar with one another first. It all takes time, when they are ready it will happen, if it doesn't there is usually some underlying issue or the stud dog is too inexperienced, or they just don't fancy each other!

Conclusion

Finding the right stud dog takes some time and effort and you need to know what your breeding goals are. The thing to bear in mind is no dog is “perfect” and as such no stud choice is going to be perfect either. The fact you have done as much research as possible improves your chances of producing nice, healthy puppies. Remember even if you find the best stud for your bitch, you might be declined by his owners. This is not a bad thing and don’t take it personally. Everyone has to do what’s best for their dog! Ensure your bitch is healthy, has had the relevant health tests and is of good temperament and be sure that you are willing to go through all the work necessary to raise puppies BEFORE breeding her. Good luck with your search!

* **The Kennel club's Mate Select** service provides a number of useful services to provide you with health related information about individual dogs that you may be considering.

It can be found at: www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/mateselect

Information about EBV's can be found at:

www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/mateselect/ebv/Default.aspx

Please note that this list has been produced to help breeders choose the best stud dog for their bitch - it is not exhaustive and ultimately it is the breeder and stud dog owners responsibility for any decisions made and their subsequent outcomes