

SOS dog – The purebred dog hobby re-examined

Johan and Edith Gallant

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Available from the authors at gallant@iafrica.com or from www.amazon.com and www.kalahari.net

SOS Dog is an eye-opener for anyone involved in breeding, treating, showing or selling pure-bred dogs. The book is thought-provoking and easy to read, but its challenge of practices that are still widely considered to be acceptable in the field of dog breeding and showing is bound to cause some controversy in dog fancier circles. Veterinarians in particular are likely to find the book stimulating in terms of re-examining their role as canine health care professionals when it comes to treating the increasing number of hereditary and breeding problems encountered in purebred dogs. Anybody who has ever visited a dog show or participated in one will identify strongly with the introduction where the main author explains the basis of the book in honest, humorous terms.

Johan and Edith Gallant, from Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, put forward a very convincing case for a total re-examination of why people breed purebred dogs, how this is done and the effect it is having on the well-being of the dogs. The fact that they are highly experienced and respected breeders of show dogs, having bred and shown dogs first in Europe and then in South Africa for several decades, lends credibility to their writing. They contend that if dog breeding continues the way it has been going for the past century since breed standards were implemented, the purebred dog may reach its demise fairly soon.

In building their argument, the authors use anthropological, historical and ethological data to paint the picture of how the dog developed from its prehistoric ancestors to what it is today. The major impact of the formation of the British Kennel Club in the late 19th century is emphasised as this was when breed standards were formulated. The role of subjective interpretation of breed standards, the shift away from functional towards show-breeding and inbreeding resulting in decreasing genetic pools of purebred dogs is well described in the build-up to the main argument. In the chapter entitled 'The Seven Capital Sins of Modern Dogdom', the authors spell out clearly and courageously their view of how breeders today are actively destroying the purebred dog. As is the case in the rest of the book, this chapter is written in a factual, non-accusatory but unambiguous

style which effectively points out the problems with dog breeding today and the way in which practices such as forced matings and ignoring the social and behavioural development needs of puppies do not contribute to the well-being of dogs.

The last chapter, 'Closing Arguments' is preceded by a fascinating chapter on 'Genuine Dogs' which makes the case that land races such as the African village dog, or AfriCanis, are authentic dogs, physically and behaviourally, as they have had to survive with minimal interference from humans and could very well be part of the solution to the problems portrayed in earlier chapters. This idea is developed further in the last chapter and other concrete recommendations for breeders and breeding organisations are made.

The book is written in an easy-to-read style and is well-referenced and scientifically credible. Important facts and comparisons are presented in boxes and tables, enhancing the user-friendliness of the book. The book is well illustrated with relevant photographs and reproductions. There is a comprehensive bibliography which clearly shows the degree of research that has gone into the publication. While each chapter covers a well-defined area making it easy to read chapters on their own, the book as a whole is well-structured, flowing effectively from chapter to chapter.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and strongly recommend it to any veterinarian or veterinary student. It has certainly made me think, not only about the history of the purebred dog fancy but also about the role of the veterinary profession in these developments. I am sure that not all veterinarians will agree with everything in the book, but the debate on veterinary ethics and animal welfare that it will undoubtedly generate, will be valuable in forming opinions, formulating policies and implementing practices that affect the veterinary profession.

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