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SPECIAL REPORT



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# A PRIME SOURCE OF CANINE OVERPOPULATION: THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

## *The Plague of Purebreds*

### *Introduction*

Despite the tragic dog overpopulation crisis in this country, the American Kennel Club (AKC) continues to actively promote the breeding and buying of purebred dogs. Each year, the AKC registers over 900,000 dogs from more than 410,000 litters of puppies. Because registration fees generate in excess of 80% of the organization's revenues, simply put, more puppies mean more money to the AKC. This financial incentive makes the AKC unlikely to reject registration applications (and the accompanying checks). Dogs from both private breeders and puppy mills are registered regardless of health, temperament, or true breeding.

While AKC registration papers are most assuredly not an indication of quality, neither are they necessarily a true reflection of breeding. Bloodlines on AKC papers are based solely on the breeder's word and are often intentionally falsified. Occasionally, the registered animals aren't even purebreds. Some breeders report more puppies than were actually in a litter and then use the extra papers for unregistered dogs; other animals are given registration papers from dogs that have died.

Former AKC inspectors confess that the organization is a sham. On December 31, 1995, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Rona Farley, an AKC inspector from 1991 to 1995, estimated that 90% of the breeders she inspected failed to meet AKC recordkeeping requirements. Sharon Reed, an AKC investigator from 1986 to 1991, also referred to fraudulent records and declared "AKC registration is worthless."

Sadly, the dogs pay the price for the AKC's greed. Health and temperament problems condemn many purebreds to an unhappy

life and an early death, while others become victims of the overpopulation crisis.

Many purebred purchases are impulse buys, decisions made with little thought and without researching breed characteristics. This is especially true of breeds featured in popular television shows and movies. These breeds are often mass-produced to meet public demand following such exposure.

Many people mistakenly assume that if someone pays a significant sum of money for a pet, they will provide the animal with good care and a permanent home. This is simply untrue. The large percentage of purebreds relinquished to shelters is a testament to the fact that purchase price is of little concern to irresponsible guardians when faced with the "inconveniences" of pet care. Frequently, the most popular breeds are relinquished in the greatest numbers. The overwhelming magnitude of this problem has led to the formation of breed specific "rescue leagues" devoted to rescuing a single breed of dog.

Shelters and rescue leagues must bear the responsibility of puppy mills, backyard breeders and the so-called "responsible" breeders, whom, with the AKC's encouragement, continue to bring more puppies into an already overpopulated world. While those dedicated to helping the unwanted dogs do their best, there just aren't enough homes for them all.

ISAR holds the AKC responsible for their contribution to the killing of millions of purebred dogs each year. You may contact this organization at: The American Kennel Club; 5580 Centerview Drive, Raleigh, NC 27606.

## *The Plague of Purebreds<sup>1</sup>*

by Dr. Eric Dunayer, VMD

In the United States, purebreds are status symbols. Many "owners" of pedigrees possess a breed chauvinism, the belief that their breed is more worthy of love and respect than other dogs. Ironically, the scorned mixed-bred dog is generally more physically and emotionally fit than the purebred.

The self-appointed promoter of purebreds is the American Kennel Club (AKC). The AKC's literature states that, "It's purpose is to ... foster and encourage interest in and the health and

welfare of purebred dogs." Yet, the very nature of breeding pedigrees is detrimental to the dogs themselves, and is irresponsible when millions of homeless dogs (both mixed-breds and purebreds) are being killed in shelters.

Purebreds suffer from inherited diseases at a far greater rate than mixed-breds. Eye diseases plague purebreds including cataracts, glaucoma, and retinal degeneration that ends in blindness. Congenital heart disease afflicts purebreds at over four times the

<sup>1</sup>This article was excerpted from Dr. Dunayer's presentation at ISAR's 1991 symposium on dog and cat overpopulation.

rate found in mixed-breds. As a result of inbreeding to create and maintain their appearance, each breed harbors over a dozen genetic defects, and there are now close to 300 genetic disorders documented in the various breeds. These defects may undermine psychological as well as physical health.

### Sources of Purebred Dogs

Despite all these problems, purebreds are still desired. Many "owners" are ignorant of these diseases; others overlook them because their love for their breed is just too strong to be bothered by these problems. The resulting demand for purebreds sustains a multimillion-dollar industry.

Having created the demand, now there must be suppliers. Purebred dogs generally come from one of three sources,

- 1) backyard breeders
- 2) "responsible" or dedicated breeders, or
- 3) pet stores, often supplied by "puppy mills."

While puppy mills have received a lot of attention for adding to the overpopulation problem, it is the other two groups—the backyard breeder and the "responsible" breeder—who produce the majority of purebred births.

For the last four years, the AKC registered close to 1.2 million dogs annually. Of these, the AKC found that only 8 percent of the registrations were for puppies purchased through pet shops, and likely born in puppy mills. The remainder of the yearly registrations were for puppies bred by backyard breeders and "responsible" breeders.



*Perhaps the most afflicted of all purebreds is the English bulldog. Wrinkles and huge skin folds are sites of skin infections. The deep, set-back nose results in short and twisted air passages and often an overlong palate and a narrowed trachea further obstruct breathing. This shortens the bulldog's life and reduces life to a ceaseless struggle against suffocation.*

### Purebreds are Abandoned

Purebreds are coming into shelters in alarming numbers. Shelter workers report that 25 percent of the dogs handled each year are purebreds. In one Chicago area shelter, purebreds account for about 50 percent of their animals. Incredibly, this number has occasionally reached 80 percent! Yet, in none of the AKC's publications does one find reference to the shelter as a place to find a dog. Instead, the AKC writes strictly about buying purebred dogs.

The AKC and its breeders can no longer hide from the problem of companion animal overpopulation. They can take immediate steps to reduce the number of purebreds born and the suffering they endure, either in puppy mills or through genetic diseases they painfully live with. In the end, however, it is the height of hypocrisy to breed and buy afflicted purebreds while healthy mixed-breds (and purebreds) perish by the millions.

Statistics: †

- Approximately 71.1 million (63%) of all U.S. households (113.7 million) contained a companion animal at some time during 2006.
- Approximately 39% of U.S. households contained at least one dog in 2007. The percentage of homes with dogs has increased from 36.5% in 1991.
- Of the households containing dogs, 63% have only one dog, 25% have two dogs, and 12% have three or more dogs.
- The AKC registers 157 different breeds of dogs.
- In 2006, the AKC processed 870,192 new dog registrations, compared to 920,804 in 2005.
- The top five breeds registered were Labrador Retrievers, Yorkshire Terriers, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, and Beagles, all of which can be found in abundance in animal shelters.
- The primary source of dog acquisition is friends and relatives, followed by breeders, newspapers/private parties, animal shelters, offspring of own dog, strays, and pet stores.
- 63% of pets were less than three months old when they were acquired.
- 80% of dog caretakers listed companionship as the major reason for acquiring their pet and 72% named affection as their pet's most endearing trait.

† These are not the statistics which accompanied the original article, but are updated figures, from the U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook (2007-2008); a 1995 national pet owner survey by the American Animal Hospital Association; the American Kennel Club Website; and from a 2007-2008 Pet Owners Survey sponsored by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.