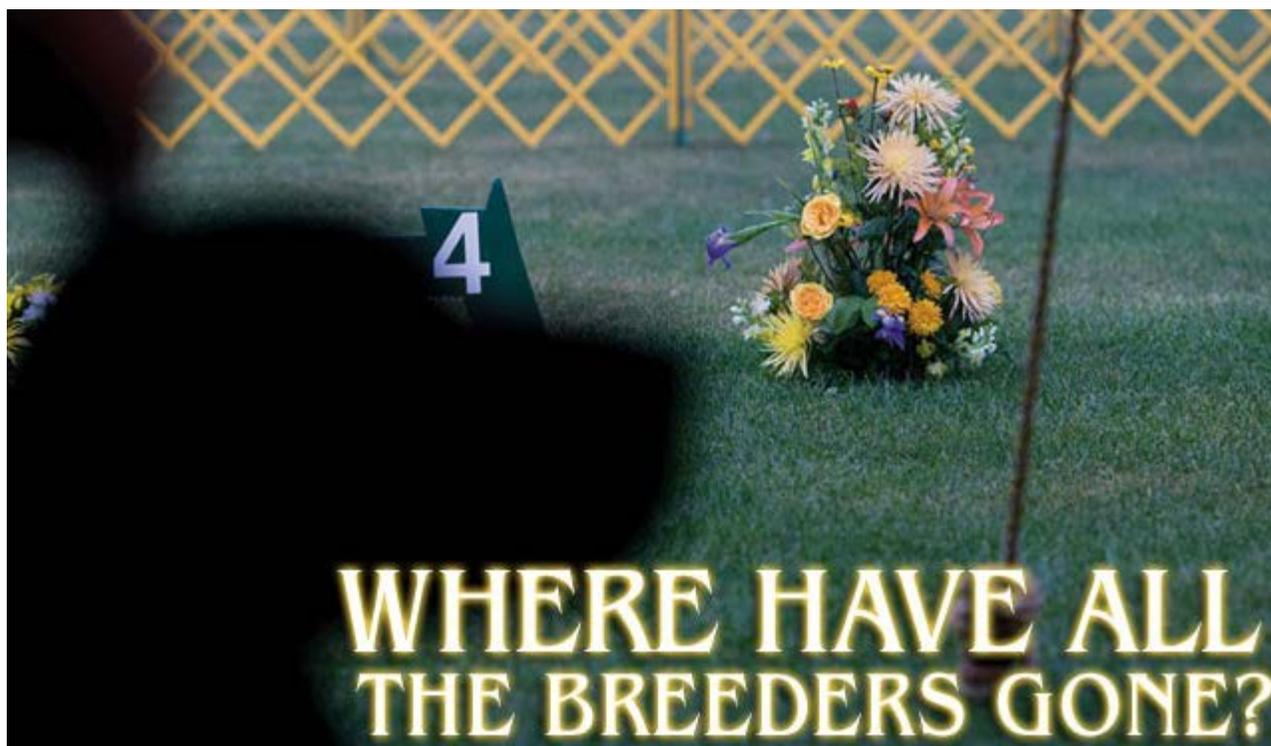


## Where Have All The Breeders Gone?

By Gay Dunlap

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When did the reversal occur? When did artificial insemination begin to be the norm and natural breeding become the exception, I asked myself recently. The realization that this is indeed the current state of canine breeding affairs came to me during a conversation with another breeder. She told me that her bitch was being bred and that she was at her reproduction vet's clinic. The dog servicing this bitch was being delivered

to the vet by its owner later that day and the breeding would be by artificial insemination. The dog was a local dog. Coveting the situation, I found the scenario to be incredulous. I am willing to sell my soul, figuratively speaking, for the opportunity to breed my bitches naturally and she was rebuffing it. I am afraid the shock was apparent in my voice; often my emotions are rather transparent. "Why?" I asked. She responded that she had always had good luck with artificial inseminations and, besides, she added, her repro vet recommended it. I rather jocularly responded, "Well, I bet she does!" Ca-ching, ca-ching ca-ching.

Don't misunderstand me. It's not that I disapprove of artificial insemination. I have been using the method for years. I attended a seminar in the early 80s, in New Jersey if memory serves me, presented by a repro vet who's name escapes me after lo these many years. But I do remember vividly his explicit instructions on how to successfully collect and inseminate. He recommended collecting the semen in a Styrofoam cup because the semen stood a better chance of remaining warm, thus keeping the sperm viable for a more extended period. I still use this method.

My first experience with it was in March of 1985 when a bitch, shipped in to be bred, presented with a stricture that my stud dog could not penetrate and I could not break. I discussed the situation with her breeder/owner and expressed a willingness to try collecting and implanting semen artificially if they wished. At the same time I suggested she might have to deliver by c-section. They wanted me to give it a try. A couple of months later she whelped seven robust puppies, naturally.

All of this aside, I feel strongly that there is a time and a place for artificially collecting and inseminating. The time and place is hardly when the dog and bitch are in close proximity. Not when a natural breeding is within reach and easy to accomplish. It is certainly less expensive. The latter is particularly significant when one considers the large sums of money we expend as breeders. Trust me, I know. I have a bitch in whelp and in the last month I have spent upwards of twenty six hundred dollars. The pups are not due for another three weeks. We still must x-ray and you breeders know as well as I that this will not be the last of it! I admit that I am speaking of a fresh chilled shipment and artificial insemination here. In this case we had the extenuating circumstances that required it; the stud dog was on the east coast, the bitch was in Arizona and it was the middle July. My last litter was the result of natural breeding that occurred because I was willing to drive over 1000 miles, basically from Gilbert, Arizona to La Crescenta, California to get it. Being from the "old school," I guess you might say I just trust natural breedings more than the alternative. Added to my confidence is the fact that I can do an AI myself if it becomes necessary. And what might necessitate this? Two examples...I have a bitch that whelps naturally but has such a small vulva that a stud dog cannot penetrate her. Then there is the dog that has not a clue what to do. He stands like a lump. Is it a case of no libido or lack of training? If it is a libido problem we must ask ourselves if we

really want to add this dog to our breeding program. If it isn't, and we want to use the dog, what other choice do we have but to do an AI?

Back to the subject at hand...why are breeders choosing alternatives to natural breeding in every instance. What are the underlying reasons? Take the dog mentioned above. If he had a normal libido why was he just standing there with a vacant look in his eye? The bitch was flagging like the wind was up. After trying every trick I knew to get the dog to perform, I called his owner and asked if he had ever "nailed" a bitch. The answer was, no. "Why," I asked. (Seems as though I am always asking why!) The response was that she was very protective of her dogs and did not want a bitch to turn around and bite him. OK, I can understand that, I suppose, and I can understand it more with some breeds than with others. But something else is wrong with this picture. The dog obviously had never been trained to be a stud dog. Yes, some dogs just do it naturally, especially if they are allowed to do it naturally; that is, allowed to nail a bitch with no outside help and no hands in the way. But this is very chancy if one is serious about the breeding. All sorts of things can go wrong...yes the bitch could not really be ovulating, it could be the wrong day for her and yes, she could turn on him. Training a dog to be a good stud dog requires time and patience. In the process, it is required that the stud dog trainer not be attached to the outcome, in other words, be prepared to accept that the breeding may not take place. This is hard to do because our ego gets in the way. We see ourselves as having failed in such an instance and many can't take "failure." By training, I mean the dog must be willing to have you right in the thick of things, holding the bitch, holding him, guiding him in, pushing him off if he is not on target, taking him out for a "cool off" before giving it another try. It can be quite time consuming. It's so much easier to give up and just collect him by hand. So this is what happens and you are a success. This is also what creates a dog that just stands there like a large marshmallow, waiting for you to do your job on him. But, let me ask you? Once the training is done, which is easier... a natural breeding or an AI? No equipment re-quired...just a dog and a bitch, a back yard or a beach towel and maybe a little KY jelly. It seems obvious that, today, most stud dog owners abdicate. They either can't be bothered with the training, don't know how to train or simply don't want to. There are those who don't want to do the AI either. For them, this is when the vet enters the picture. For some stud dog owners, the entire scene is too messy, too nasty to bother with. Many of them will not allow a bitch in season, other than their own of course, to enter their home. Meeting at the vet's office is far more pleasant...they don't even have to watch...never mind the cost. For them it is well worth the price.

Another somewhat recent stand within the breeding community is that of the stud dog owner who decides that his dog is not at "public stud." What is this about? Here is a person who breeds his bitches this way and that, and I mean this rhetorically, using others' stud dogs and, in return, is unwilling to reciprocate. Not that I can't appreciate being selective with the use of one's stud dog. This is one manner in which I feel the fancy has grown...probably as a result of the popular-sire syndrome scare and its consequent diminished gene pool. But such a blanket statement as not allowing ones' dog to be at public stud deserves, at the very least, an explanation. As breeders, we have a responsibility to always act in the best interest of our respective breeds. To my way of thinking, without a valid explanation, refusing to offer a worthwhile dog at stud is contrary to these interests and totally non-supportive of the breed. Furthermore, it flies in the face of and denies the importance of a strong and vibrant gene pool.

On top of this, it is becoming the norm to finish dogs and then castrate them and place them in pet homes. Some are collected before the castration (thank God). At least we have their vital essence! But many are simply lost to the breed; their owners acting in total ignorance, it would seem, oblivious to the importance of a large gene pool. "Oh, nobody is going to use him," or "Nobody has used him, so why should I keep him intact," I hear. Some of these dogs being referred to are quite young. Of course no one has used them. In my breed where there is a health issue, many of us are looking to older dogs. There won't be any older dogs if this current situation continues unabated.

Between dogs not offered at public stud and dogs being neutered, the gene pool may shrink to the point where we will become an endangered species...animal rights groups will have it their way after all!

In case one assumes I am singling out stud dogs' owners, don't forget that these stud dog owners always have their own bitches and often it is at their request that artificial insemination be the chosen method of breeding. Again I must ask, what is this about? Do they not care to prove a stud dog's healthy libido? Or is it just the easiest route? Let's not forget that a natural breeding can be quite revealing about the bitch's temperament as well.

Lest I sound completely negative, I would like to point out some positive attributes of artificial insemination. Whether fresh chilled or frozen, the technology has opened wide the doors for breeding to dogs never before available in time and space, often serving to increase our gene pools. We can import frozen semen from anywhere in the world and store it for as long as we wish. We can breed to dogs whose frozen semen was stored years ago, in theory, bringing them back from the dead. I will soon breed a bitch to her great grandfather, who was collected and frozen in 1987 and died at 16 years of age in 1992. She is his great granddaughter by dint of her grandmother having been one of seven pupsicles (her father's frozen semen was used for the first time in 1996.) Amazing when you think about it.

We no longer are at the mercy of the airlines, worrying about the whims of Mother Nature, unable to ship in the heat of summer or on frigid winter days. We can ship chilled semen with ease and with good results on all counts so long as we have a competent

reproduction specialist vet, more crucial on the receiving end. The use of frozen semen remains dicey even with surgical implantation (which appears to be the method most preferred and offering the best results by those in the know). Personally I have had more failures than successes. Still, I continue to collect and freeze semen on my best males. I do believe it's a good thing.

But still I must ask, where have all the breeders gone? For starters, they no longer have kennels, large or small. Instead they function from tract houses with small yards, or fancy houses with big yards or small condos in big cities with no yard at all. They are not set up to do what they are trying to do: be breeders. They are not willing to share their little house, fancy home or condo with a bitch in heat. Their own bitches wear panties when they are in heat. They do not want a stud dog lifting his leg on the bed skirt or the Chippendale chair. And then there's the wall-to-wall carpeting...what about that? There's always the basement...dark and dank...and some breeders do just that. You know what I mean.

Understand, I am not making a judgment about how people choose to live but if one wants to be considered a serious breeder, one's lifestyle must change. After moving here I pulled up yard upon yard of wall-to-wall carpet (the fact that it was Kelly green made it an easier task!) and installed tile throughout. This way, although the house is small, my dogs are allowed the run of it most of the time. They have a room (former bedroom) of their own and although smaller than what I had in Santa Fe, it works. I had my contractor remove a window, replacing it with a door. Within the door we installed a doggie door so that the dogs have direct access to the side yard, which has become all theirs as it is fenced off from the back yard. Since the back is somewhat larger I let them have a gallop there at least three times a day. Inside, a gate at the entrance to "their room" secures them there when I am gone and at other times when being loose is inappropriate. It all works.

When I have a bitch in to be bred, she stays in my bedroom, which is as far as you can get from the dog room and still be in the house. I replaced a window with a door here, as well, so that the other side of the house could become a kennel run, when called for, simply by blocking it off at one end. A few years ago I had two litters, a day apart. One whelped in my office and the other in my bedroom. That worked too.

What I am trying to say here is that if you want to do this right, be willing to make modifications to your lifestyle. Consider teaching your dog to be a competent and dependable stud dog. And train him that lifting a leg in the house is absolutely unforgivable; I have shared my home with many frequently used stud dogs and they were all perfect gentleman in that regard. Consider learning how to do your own breedings. By the way, it is not okay to keep your dogs in the basement! It is not alright to whelp and raise your puppies there either. If all of this is too much and you don't want to get your hands dirty, that's fine. But, if this is the case, I would respectfully suggest you refrain from calling yourself a breeder.