

# The Search For A Stud Dog

by Linda Monroe, [cmonroe@tenet.edu](mailto:cmonroe@tenet.edu)

This article is intended to help bitch owners in their search for a stud dog that will complement their bitch. It is divided into parts:

1. Evaluating the bitch.
2. Researching stud dogs.
3. Working with stud dog owners.

## Evaluating The Bitch

One of the hardest parts for many owners considering breeding their bitch is looking at their bitch objectively. Compare her to the AKC Mastiff standard, and make a list of her faults and a list of her strengths. If you have trouble, ask one or more respected Mastiff breeders or judges to help you. Prioritize the list from most important to least important. Then narrow the list down to the three best strengths and the three worst faults. What do you like best about her? What would you most like to improve? These decisions depend on your opinion, your knowledge, your judgment. It is good to get other opinions, but ultimately the responsibility rests with you, the bitch's owner. Some things to consider are:

- Temperament:
  - trainability
  - attitude toward other dogs
  - attitude toward people - strangers and people she knows
  - ability to cope with new situations
- Soundness / Health:
  - allergies
  - hips & elbows (OFA), other joints
  - eyes (CERF)
  - thyroid / VWD
  - problems that your veterinarian has noticed
  - movement: side, front, rear
  - athletic / clumsy
- Breed Type:
  - size: height, weight, bone
  - body: muscling, depth, breadth (front & rear)
  - angulation: front, rear, pasterns, top line
  - bite: scissors - undershot, wry, breadth of jaw
  - pigment: mask, ears, feet, nails, eyes, white markings
  - coat: texture, length, undercoat, color
  - head type: length of muzzle, jowls, breadth, stop, furrow
  - proportion: body to height, head to body, tail length, ears

- feet: shape, tightness

If your bitch has had a litter before, look at the offspring to determine if any faults or strengths of the bitch were passed on to the offspring. Make a list of likes and dislikes. If your bitch has never had a litter, try to look at the offspring of her littermates. It will help you to determine what you need to improve the most in your bitch.

Have all of the testing and health checks done on the bitch well in advance of breeding her. Get her hips and elbows OFA'd. If she is not two yet, you can have OFA preliminary hip and elbow evaluations done so you will know what to expect later. Have her eyes CERF'd and her thyroid and von Willebrand tested. Be sure all of the tests are current before breeding. The CERF and thyroid should be done yearly. Have a complete physical done on the bitch. Check her heart and do a complete blood work up to rule out any kidney or liver dysfunctions. You may also want to have a vaginal culture done to determine if any potential bacterial problems will arise. Have a brucellosis test performed within ten days of breeding. Determining that your bitch is in good health and sound before breeding will give you a better chance of producing sound, healthy pups, and the bitch will hopefully not have any problems carrying or caring for the litter.

## **Researching Stud Dogs**

If you cannot visit the prospective studs in person contact the stud dog's owners and ask for a video of him in a natural setting. You want to see him running around and from every angle. Photographs are second best, they can be very deceptive. Do your homework well in advance of the breeding. You will need months or even a year to gather all of the information you will need. Inform the stud owner about when you will need the stud. Do not wait until the bitch is in heat to contact potential stud owners. They don't like last minute breedings either and they will need time to receive information from you about your bitch.

Open, honest discussion is very important. Talk to each stud dog's owner about your bitch, her strengths and weaknesses. Ask the owner to tell you about the stud's strengths and weaknesses. Determine if he would be a good candidate for your bitch. Discuss both the bitch's and the stud's temperaments, habits, attitudes, etc. Determine what traits the stud puts on his offspring and what the offspring seem to get from the bitch. Is he dominant in any particular traits such as mask, angulation, bite, etc. Ask if the stud owner has kept any pups from the stud. If not, why not?

### **Determine Health and Soundness**

Ask for copies of any tests that have been done. An absolute must is OFA certification for hips and elbows. Ask for a copy of his CERF EXAM sheet. Do not accept the CERF certificate as proof of having normal eyes. Also, request a copy of his thyroid test, preferably done by Michigan State University within the last year. Lesser, but still important considerations are the vWD and patella registrations. If the stud you are considering is not tested, ask the stud owner to have the tests done. Many will be willing to do the things that you request. If

finances are a problem, offer to pay for the testing yourself and you can either deduct them from the stud fee, or if the tests are poor, consider it money well spent to avoid potential problems. I would much rather spend \$200 now, than have an entire litter with problems later. Often the only test(s) that are missing are the least expensive like CERF, thyroid or vWD. Most stud owners that agree to test will pay for it themselves. It benefits them now and in the future to have a stud cleared of potential genetic defects. They can make wiser breeding decisions when armed with more knowledge. Have a brucellosis test done on the stud within ten days of breeding to your bitch. If he has serviced another bitch with a natural breeding just prior to breeding your bitch, then do it after that breeding. This is extremely important. Brucellosis is a serious venereal disease that causes abortions, still births and sterility, among other problems. It is also transmissible to humans and other mammals.

#### Temperament

Since most dogs are not formally temperament tested, you must determine this by other means. A Ch, CD, TDI, or CGC title is a big help. It generally indicates that the stud can be in close contact with people and other dogs without hurting anyone or getting nervous or scared. If you can't meet the stud in person, then go by his titles, or ask people that know him or have bred bitches to him what they think. A perfectly wonderful stud may not have any titles for a variety of reasons. First hand experience, and talking to others, is the best way to determine the temperament of any stud.

#### Relatives

Try to see as many relatives, especially offspring, of each potential stud as you can. Ask the stud owner for a list of owners of bitches that have had pups sired by the stud dog. Talk to the bitches owners and ask for their opinion of the offspring produced. Determine if he puts his good qualities on the offspring. Does he throw himself? Does he throw better than himself? Worse? If he produced well with one bitch and not another, look at the pedigrees to see if the good one is comparable to yours. He may "click" with one bloodline and not another. Usually an experienced stud dog's owner will know which bloodlines go well with their stud. If no offspring are available, look at the stud's parents, grandparents, siblings and the siblings' offspring. Is the stud similar to his relatives, or is he unique? In general, traits that are similar across relatives are more likely to appear in his offspring than traits that are unique.

#### Pedigrees

Look at the pedigree of the bitch and all of the potential stud dogs. A pedigree is useful only if you know about the ancestors. What did they look like, were they sound, what did they produce, etc. A nice, tight line breeding is great if all of the dogs in the pedigree are exceptional, and you can have some assurance of getting those qualities that you most desire. An outcross may be what you need. All Mastiffs are very much related if you go back far enough in the pedigree. Sometimes an outcross produces exactly what you want, sometimes not, just like a line breeding may not turn out as expected. I personally put pedigrees low on my list of things to worry about.

## Strengths and Faults

Make a list of all the strengths and faults of the stud as you did for the bitch. Narrow the list down to the three worst faults and the three best features. Decide if you can tolerate the faults and if the strengths are what your bitch needs. Make a list of all of the studs that have the single best attribute that corresponds with your bitch's worst fault. If your bitch has a poor head for example, but is correct in body, look for studs with outstanding heads whose offspring also have outstanding heads. Of course you must still look at the total stud. You wouldn't want to breed to a dog with an outstanding head that, for example, has straight stifles and a poor top line. Use your judgment! Remember, a serious fault in your bitch will not be corrected by a stud that is overdone in that area. Typically, you will get pups with traits of each, not a blend. It is always best to breed to a male that is better than your bitches faults, and is correct and balanced over all.

## Working With Stud Dog Owners

Stud fees are as wide ranging as the stud dogs themselves. Discuss all expenses involved in breeding to a particular stud. If you are doing a natural breeding, ask if you will be boarding your bitch with them and do they charge a daily boarding fee. How long will the bitch be there? If you are shipping sperm, find out who pays for collecting and shipping of the sperm. Usually the bitch owner pays all expenses involved, but some stud owners provide the sperm under the general stud fee and others split the cost.

When is the stud fee due? How much of a deposit is required if any? When do you pay the balance? Can you send payments as soon as you know the bitch is pregnant? When will the litter application be signed? Most stud owners will not sign a litter registration application until the entire stud fee is collected. Be sure to have money put aside for this expense. Most will let you wait until the pups are several weeks old, or even sold, so that you can collect deposits on the pups and not have such a large outlay of cash.

Quite often the stud fee is paid with a puppy from the resulting litter. Ask if the stud owner wants pick of the litter or if they would accept second pick. Determine if they have a particular sex or color of the pup in mind as the fee. Find out at what age they will want to pick the pup. You cannot sell any of the pups until the stud owner has chosen theirs. Will the stud owner come and pick the pup personally, have someone else do it, or will they want you to choose? If they are not picking the pup up personally, find out who pays to have the pup shipped. Pick of the litters have often been the downfall of the relationship between the bitch and stud owner. In my opinion, it is best to pay a cash stud fee and give the stud owner first option of buying a pup if they choose. That way you can keep the pup you want, get attached and have fun with the pups.

What about the what if's? What if only one or two pups are born? What if the breeding doesn't take at all? The pups are absorbed, aborted, still born, etc? What if they are all of the same sex? What if none or only a few live to eight weeks? Find out in advance what the stud owners policy is for every conceivable scenario. Most stud owners will offer a repeat breeding at no charge if there are no pups from the first attempt. Some will offer

another breeding if only one or two pups are born. Find out what is the minimum considered to be a litter. Some charge their stud fee at a certain price based upon the number of pups born. What is the maximum? Who pays the expenses of the repeat breeding? Determine what is acceptable to you.

Get it in writing. Get every little detail in writing. After deciding on a stud or studs and finding out the details, make sure the stud owner(s) put it in writing. If they do not have a contract, offer to write it up for them. I've had contracts come in that weren't even close to what we discussed on the phone! If the contract is not acceptable, edit it and return it to the stud owner for correction or clarification. Be sure everything you discussed and all of the contingencies are in the contract. Remember, more problems occur due to misunderstandings than outright fraud or dishonesty.

When your stud choice has been made, return the finalized contract along with the deposit, if required. Keep in touch with the stud owner as to the progress of your bitch.

Now that you have chosen the perfect stud for your bitch, you need to choose a second perfect stud! You already have all of your lists and details, so this part is usually easier. Contact the second chosen stud owner and see if they would mind acting as a reserve in case the first stud is unavailable at the time you need him. He may be out of town showing, he may have a prior engagement at that exact time with another bitch (who beat you to him), his sperm may not hold up for shipping, he may be ill or even have died by then. Keep the second stud owner informed as to the progress of your bitch also. A knowledgeable stud owner will not be offended by being chosen second place. They will understand your decision regarding the first stud, and know all of the things that can happen between now and then. They will understand your decision and admire your honesty. Out of all the studs available in the world, I could live with mine being number two on anyone's list. It's like coming in reserve winners at a large prestigious show!

After your decision has been made, contact the other stud owners and tell them that you have decided not to breed to their stud at this time. You may tell them that the one you have selected was chosen for a particular reason as the best over all candidate for your particular bitch at this time. Nothing personal about their stud - you would not have contacted them in the first place if you didn't like their boy! He may be a good candidate or reserve for the next breeding to this bitch or a different one. If he was deleted from your list for testing reasons like hips, eyes, etc., you may tell them that is the reason and encourage them to have these tests done so that you may consider them at a later time.

Probably the hardest part of the search for the right stud for your bitch is the personality of the stud owner. Do not let that influence you if you can help it. If you do not like the owner, but the stud is perfect, do it anyway. Don't let personal feelings stand between you and a perfect litter. The stud owner may not like you either and should put their personal feelings aside when determining if the bitch is of good quality, capable of producing puppies to be proud of, and contributing to the betterment of the breed. Neither stud owner or bitch owner should breed to each others dog simply because they like each other. A stud owner should never breed a bitch just to collect stud fee and a bitch owner

should never breed just to produce puppies to sell. The betterment of the breed should be the most important aspect of any mating. Period.

If the stud is not within driving distance, decide if you want to ship the bitch to the stud or have sperm sent to the bitch. Make the necessary arrangements on both ends well in advance and get with it! Good luck!

In summary:

### **DO**

test your bitch  
do your homework  
insist on brucellosis  
get a stud contract  
get a backup stud  
get copies of test results  
breed for need  
keep the stud owner informed

### **DO NOT**

keep the stud owner informed  
breed because he's nearby  
breed only for size  
breed the same fault together  
worry about color  
breed so the kids can see pups being born  
breed for prestige  
wait until the last minute