

BUILDING UP A BITCH LINE

by Marjorie Bunting, Ragus Kennels
Reprinted from *ANTIC*, Winter, 1988

Our record-breaking puppy CC winner Ragus Boy Blue comes from a line of five generations of champion bitches. I have been asked "how do you breed a line of good bitches?"

Taking my memory back over the generations to Dolly (Baby Doll), the dam of the first champion Witch (Bewitched), the answer is you don't deliberately plan it. That doesn't mean it resulted by accident from haphazard matings. Planning was there through each generation, but mainly to improve on the last generation, not necessarily to build a good bitch line.

It could be said that luck played a part. We always keep the pick of each litter whatever the sex or colour, and from this line we were lucky as often the pick was a bitch.

When you are founding a line two things are essential. First, a **good brood bitch** who doesn't necessarily need to be a champion - although the more faults you have in your foundation bitch the more problems there will be to sort out over future generations.

But more important than her looks is her pedigree. A well-planned pedigree, with line breeding to the best in the breed, is a great help as you have something to build on and don't have to start from scratch.

The other essential is a **knowledge of the breed**. You need to know its prevalent faults and virtues, as well as details of individuals behind your foundation bitch. And that means all of them, not just the well-known winners, as trouble can so easily come from an unknown dog or bitch who was little thought of because he/she was not shown.

Norfolk Terriers today are still suffering from such a bitch who was the dam of a famous champion in the fifties. All thought concentrated on the sire of the champion, who was a very successful stud dog. None of us concentrated on his dam and her breeding. You live and learn as they say!

Dolly had good breed type in that she was short in back and legs with a reasonable head. She also had a good coat texture and length. Her problem was structure, particularly in shoulders. So we needed a dog who excelled in this point, with a good head. This last being essential as, although her head was reasonable, this was a difficult point in the breed at that time. Judges didn't appear to know what a good Norfolk head was and put up ones with faults which were often described as virtues!

We had a dog in our kennel, Sir Bear, who not only had the required points for Dolly but was line bred to the best dog in her pedigree, Heckle, a dog with a good head and shoulders. The result of this mating was the first champion of the line, Witch.

She had most of the points we were looking for - good head, bone, substance, short back and legs, was very sound. Her main problem was that although having a good enough temperament to gain her three DDs, she became bored very easily in the ring, so this had to be the essential point for her mate.

There was an obvious choice, the most famous Norfolk ever at that time, the first group winner, Ready. He certainly had the temperament. When we researched his pedigree, we found that although he did not have Heckle behind him, he was line bred to dog Widgeon Bunny, another famous champion of his day, and the source of the qualities in Heckle we liked so much. He was Heckle's sire's dam's grandsire.

Ready's head was not quite good enough but Witch not only had a good head, she was line bred to good heads, so it seemed worth trying. And it worked, not only producing the next generation of champion bitches in Brownie (Brown Sugar), but also her litter brother Buttermilk, who was a good winner both here and in Sweden, his eventual home.

Brownie had a good temperament, good bone and substance, short back and legs and was sound. However she inherited Ready's head, so that was our next problem, to bring out the good heads in her background.

We had a second line going in our kennel, and from this we bred a dog, Herbie (Whipcord), who was to become not only the breed's first black and tan champion but also the top Norfolk stud dog as the sire of 16 champions. He was five months older than Brownie, and line bred to Heckle through Sir Bear and Heckle's daughter Hilarity. He had the head Brownie needed as well as the right lines in his pedigree.

Mated together over a period of five years, they produced seven champions, one of these being the next generation of champion bitches, Harriet (Bitter Orange).

Harriet was a winner from her first ring appearance at six months old, when she won best puppy and best bitch in show at a club open show. She had all the points needed but her coat was not quite hard enough in texture. This she inherited from Sir Bear to whom she was line bred. He had inherited it from a dog we owned in our early days in the breed in the forties, some nine generations back. Don't ever think you've bred something out, because if you do, it is certain it will immediately pop up to confound you!

We mated Harriet to one of our own breeding, Micky (Bitterman), who had a perfect coat. He was out of her full sister Smudge (Brown Smudge) by a son of Brownie's litter brother Buttermilk, thus carrying on the line breeding in Widgeon Bunny, Heckle, Sir Bear. The result of this was Blackberry, the next generation of champion bitches. She was very like her mother but with a better coat. Her problem was a slightly upright shoulder.

This problem has always been a prevalent fault in the breed, but one which we had avoided for a long time, mainly because of line breeding to Sir Bear who excelled in shoulders. Blackberry inherited her doubtful shoulders from her paternal grandsire, which shows how easy it is to bring in an undesirable point when using a line which you don't know well. You see to get Micky, we had line bred to our own line, but to do that had had to use a dog from another kennel with a line we didn't know.

So the obvious mate for Blackberry was back to her grandsire Herbie, who excelled in shoulders, which he had inherited from his grandsire, Sir Bear and great-great-grandsire Heckle. This produced the fifth generation of champion bitches, Blue Jay, otherwise Kelley to her friends.

For Kelly, with generations of line breeding for specific reasons behind her, we needed a dog with similar breeding to carry on the qualities she had inherited. Two years ago a dog called Ch. Jaeva Matti Brown had put the breed on the map by twice winning reserve in the terrier group, one of these was at Crufts. He was only the second champion for a new kennel owned by Martin Phillips, which was founded on our breeding. He had all the points we wanted, plus quality, style, call it what you will, but that indefinable something that makes a good one exceptional.

As I said, the five generations of champion bitches were not planned as such, but they happened because each generation was planned to improve on the previous one. So let me end with a third essential when founding a line; i.e., pedigree and appearance, they are both important. In other words; it's no good trying to plan pedigrees too far ahead, except in general terms. You must wait for each generation to arrive to see what points they have which you need to keep or lose, before planning their mates.

Of course, it shouldn't need to be said, but the first essential of all when founding a line of good bitches is to get bitch puppies in your litters!

by Marjorie Bunting