

Oodles of Doodles

By Naomi Kane

The history of most of today's purebred dogs starts something along the lines of Lord Somethingorother, local gamekeepers or huntsmen needed a dog that could catch rats all day long, herd livestock, guard something special, pull heavy loads or hunt over some special terrain, so they bred local dogs to imported dogs to achieve this special purpose and created the Wirehaired Specialhund. The Wirehaired Specialhund remained popular even when it's original job became obsolete because of it's wonderful temperament, adaptability etc., etc.

We have purebred dogs today because a fancier or a few fanciers thought a dog with those characteristics would be useful or just nice to have around. So what is wrong with experimenting, why not try new things and what exactly is the difference between the Bullmastiff and the labradoodle aside from the silly name?

Qualities of a Purebred

A purebred dog comes from the mating of two registered purebred dogs of the same breed. The resulting puppies can be reliably predicted to have the physical and mental characteristics of their ancestors. This means that if you breed a Poodle to a Poodle you will reliably get Poodle puppies that will grow up to look and act like Poodles.

Purebred dogs have a standard of excellence, a written description of the breed's ideal look and characteristics. Generations of purebred dogs have been carefully screened and selected so that only the healthiest, best tempered and best looking are used to produce more puppies of that breed. Purebred dogs are registered and have pedigrees that can be traced back in some cases to the very beginning of the breed. The qualities of the dogs that go into the pedigrees are known and recorded so that faults and good qualities can be tracked. Breeders and breed clubs work tirelessly to maintain high ethical standards and keep the look, temperament and health of each breed.

A distressing number of people think that simply putting a name to a mixed breed puppy makes it a real breed. Jugs, pugles, schweatens, cockapoos and every doodle imaginable are populating parks and handbags around the world. Clearly many people either don't know or don't care that if you mate a Pug to a Beagle you have a litter of mutts even if you call them "Puggles".

Misinformation and rumour touted as fact; the all too human propensity for falling in love with the first cute puppy you see; and a real lack of awareness on the part of purebred dog breeders and organizations has resulted in a worldwide frenzy of crossbreeding anything to everything. Crossbred puppies with goofy names are advertised as "designer breeds" and sell for exorbitant prices while carefully bred health tested purebred puppies from responsible breeders are

overlooked.

Characteristics of Crossbreeds

How many times have we all heard that mutts are healthier than purebreds, mutts have hybrid vigour or that Poodle crosses are hypo allergenic? *The myth* is that if you breed together two dogs of different breeds you can accurately predict the exact attributes the ensuing puppies will display, and that these “designer dogs” are healthier than purebreds due to “hybrid vigour”. *The truth* is that crossing two different breeds will result in some puppies looking like each parent and some puppies resembling a mix of the two - maybe. Even though the breeders of these pups say they can predict things like coat type, colour, temperament and size they cannot. The only things that can be predicted for sure are that the puppies will be awfully cute because puppies always are, and many of these dogs will end up in shelters because they got bigger and aren't hypoallergenic as advertised.

Doodle dogs are deliberate crossbreeds and the breeders of these dogs have no intention of developing a breed; they simply continue to crossbreed and sell puppies. Doodle producers do some really fancy double talk touting their puppies as special and better because they are crossbred. If you have a weak heart or high blood pressure skip the next section or at least make sure you are sitting down. The North American Cockapoo Registry – yes, they call themselves a registry; that isn't the shocking part - says “A true cockapoo is ONLY a purposeful, planned crossing of a purebred cocker spaniel with a purebred poodle. Without a traceable background anything cute and fuzzy could be (and has been) passed off as a "cockapoo" by unscrupulous people.” If they weren't so successful it would be funny but instead of seeing the idiocy and finding a nice Poodle or a Cocker Spaniel with a real traceable background, people read that and buy a cockapoo.

Most labradoodle merchants offer labradoodles and Australian labradoodles. The difference between them is that Australian labradoodles are supposed to be a purebred developed from infusions of a few other breeds into the original Poodle/Lab crosses. According to some websites there is a move to seek eventual breed recognition. So now they have it both ways: A mixed breed is better, except when it isn't.

Hybrid Vigour

Millions of dollars has been put into health research and testing by responsible breeders of purebred dogs. Records and databases going back generations make health issues in purebred dogs visible; therefore it looks like purebred dogs have lots of health issues. There is no database or record for mixed-breed dogs, but it is evident from observation that crossbred dogs have health problems.

Crossbreed producers claim to be breeding “top quality” dogs and fixing health problems by producing puppies with “hybrid vigour”. To begin with, no reputable breeder would knowingly sell a puppy to somebody planning to produce mixes, so the breeding stock must come from other less-than-reputable sources. The quality and health of their bloodlines is suspect to say the least.

Hybrid vigour refers to the mating of two different species within a family of animals, such as a lion and a tiger, a horse and a donkey, or a dog and a wolf. Since crossbreed dogs are simply a mating of a dog and another dog the genes for health problems have an excellent chance of doubling up and expressing themselves in the resulting offspring. Claims of super health are nonsense; veterinarians see as many problems in “designer dogs” as in purebreds. Since most of the doodle producers do not do health testing and their breeding stock is unlikely to come from health tested backgrounds some poor “designer dogs” get the worst of both worlds and inherit different problems from each parent.

So what is the difference between a Bullmastiff and a labradoodle? The Bullmastiff (or any other purebred) breeds true, and puppies can be guaranteed to be as advertised. Purebred dogs are the result of research, artistry and dedication. While there are irresponsible breeders and there are problems in the purebred fancy, purebred dogs are healthy and reliable overall. Labradoodles and other mixes are a hodgepodge of possibilities that cannot be predicted thrown together in an effort to make a quick buck. Size, colour, coat type and temperament are a guess at best.

A Wake up Call

People “in dogs” have no idea of the gulf that exists between them and the average person looking for a pet. Despite the obvious discrepancies between myth and reality many people continue to believe the doodle hype. Purebred dog clubs and breeders need to realize that they are in direct competition with the doodle merchants because many people think a St. Berdoodle is a breed.

Purebred breeders are passionate and protective of their breeds and have been in the habit of downplaying them to discourage too much popularity. It is not untypical for a breeder to answer puppy enquiries by listing all the reasons why their breed is not suitable for everybody, especially the person calling to enquire. There are breeders that won’t sell to pet homes or only breed if they want to keep a puppy for their own breeding program, leaving potential pet dog owners puppy-less and feeling snubbed.

Responsible breeders don’t like to advertise in newspapers, and are afraid to market their dogs because they don’t want to be perceived as puppy merchants. If responsible breeders are hard to find or won’t breed for the pet market, then pet dog buyers will go where they *can* get a puppy - straight to the designer-dog merchant who makes them feel special because they have a special

dog that is “better than a purebred”. Once they have that puppy they will love it, protect it and defend it as passionately as any purebred breeder.

The world of purebred dogs needs to wake up and get marketing, educating and reaching out to the average pet buying person or watch as oodles of doodles fill the need for pet dogs.

Creating a Breed

The Canadian Kennel Club by-laws state that members “... *shall not engage in the breeding, buying or selling of dogs that are not purebred, unless such activity is consistent with the Objects of the Club and has received the prior approval of the Board.*”

Before a breeder could proceed to create a new breed, they would have to make a proposal to the CKC Board and get permission following the guidelines of the *Animal Pedigree Act*.

With the support of the CKC Board it might be possible to convince responsible purebred dog breeders that using their champion bloodlines to create a different breed would be a worthy goal. For the purposes of this article, we will assume some could be convinced and a breeder found suitable animals to begin a breeding program. After several years and dozens of litters, and growing out suitable dogs and breeding back to this or that and finding homes for pups and checking health and keeping records a new and unique breed is created. Wirehaired Specialhund dogs bred to Wirehaired Specialhund bitches produce Wirehaired Specialhund pups that can grow up and be bred to other Wirehaired Specialhunds and produce pups that are recognizably Wirehaired Specialhunds and nothing else. Along the way a club or association of fanciers would grow and sufficient interest in the breed would develop, a breed standard would be written and then, after all that, the new breed could apply for recognition by the Canadian Kennel Club.

It could be done and it has been done, but it takes far more time, money and dedication than simply adding doodle to a breed name.

A Failed Experiment

Poodle/retriever crosses were first tried by Wally Conron of Guide Dogs Victoria in Australia. The idea was to produce a guide dog that did not cause allergic reactions. This experimental effort started in 1989 and was abandoned in 1996. Guide Dogs Victoria found that fewer than 35 percent of the puppies went on to qualify as guides; temperaments and coat types were unreliable; and many of the genetic problems were the same in both breeds so those problems were passed on as well. Guide Dogs Victoria has no intention of breeding this cross again. Websites trumpet the labradoodle as somehow legitimate because it was first bred as a guide dog but fail to mention that it wasn't a very successful one.

What's the Alternative?

When you buy a purebred dog you are buying the product of careful selection, pride and knowledge. Responsible breeders take their dogs to shows allow them to be judged by experts, and do health and capability testing to make sure the dogs are temperamentally and physically good examples of the breed.

Deliberately creating mixed breeds and foisting them on pet buyers as “guaranteed”, “hypoallergenic”, “the perfect family pet” and “healthier” than purebred dogs is dishonest and taking risks regarding the quality of life of the dogs produced.

All dogs can be great companions and wonderful pets. There are plenty of mixed breeds in shelters across the country. Before they ended up homeless many of them had been sold at ridiculous prices to uninformed people. Why not feel good about getting a dog out of a shelter, rather than supporting a system that breeds mixes, then promotes them as special.

Making the choice

PUREBRED

- Predictable
- Registered
- Health Tested
- Guaranteed
- Tradition of excellence

DESIGNER CROSS-BRED

- Your guess is as good as mine.

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