**TRUTH REGARDING JOINT DYSPLASIA IN OUR LABRADORS**

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**Diann Sullivan**

This young couple in Colorado, who had inquired about using either my AM.CAN.CH.CEDARWOODS FLT OF THE PHOENIX or CAN.CH.CEDARWOODS MASTER FLT PLAN as a stud dog. I thanked them for their inquiry and guided them to send me copies of CERF within one year, OFA hips and elbows and I preferred optigen testing but explained what that was, it's importance to our breed and how that worked as a recessive means of inheritance. I explained progesterone testing for a successful litter and asked them if there was anything else I could do.

THIS is the reply I receive back. I was very disheartened at first and then sincerely replied with an attempt to share with them that screening breeding animals against hips and elbow dysplasia as well as investigating what their ancestor’s produce, that over generations, the breed IS improved in hip and elbow joint conformation. I tried to present to them also in such a way as not to offend but to teach and encourage their desire to breed better dogs.

To: cedarwoodlabradors  
Subject: Re: Stud inquiry  
  
Diann,  
  
Thanks for your time and advise, but we will have to pass on using your stud. We have done a lot of research on OFA and have a friend that works at the Veterinary College in Fort Collins, CO and along with our personal Vet, we all feel the same about OFA certification. We believe that getting our dogs OFA certified is a false security for us and our clients.

You can get your dog certified at 2 years and then never get them certified again and that doesn't make sense to us because they can get hip dysplasia at anytime after that and not be tested. There are proven cases of dogs having excellent hips at 2 years and then getting hip dysphasia before they are 5 years old, it has a lot to do with exercise and diet, a test is not going to guarantee the dog from getting hip dysplasia.

We try to provide our clients with the proper information and education to help prevent dysplasia from happening because it is not all hereditary. It also is no guarantee that either one of the parents with excellent or good hips won't have offspring with bad hips. We understand that a lot of breeders get their dogs OFA certified to bring up the price on the puppies and to us that just doesn't seem right. Thanks again for your time and good luck with your dogs.  
  
S. And K.

Dear S. And K.,

I would personally love to see you step into the 'level' of dogs where every breeding is more and more predictable for breed type including correct working coat, correct structure, working ability AND, physical soundness including hips, elbows and eyes that ARE influenced by genetic screening.

I appreciate that 'local vets' don't always know so much about hip and elbow dysplasia as I have lived through a few examples myself. Breeders committed to a breeder’s code of ethics and genetic screening on breeding animals over many generations, continually learn as they see and collect data and definitely know more than many veterinarians. This is truer of many years ago versus now. In 1987, I sold a yellow female puppy to a hunter here in my area and at age two, he took her into have her hips radiographed for OFA. The veterinarian I had known for many years and in fact, attended a Bible study at his home- I happened to be home and even in the house when the call came from the very angry dog owner to tell me what this veterinarian had just told him. He was told that "The hips are so bad that the dog should be spayed right then". I replied that I will pay for the films to be sent to OFA where board certified radiologists (x-ray specialists), review and certify or not the x-rays and he could always take her back should she need to be spayed. In about three weeks, the owner phoned to tell me that the dog received an OFA EXCELLENT ! I can only deduct that this vet either needed or wanted the spay money or didn't know how to read hip evaluation x-rays.

Screening breeding animals against dysplasia over generations DOES make a difference ! I bought a gorgeous black male in 1980 from a long-time breeder in New York who was very involved with the local and National clubs. The sire and dam did have OFA certification for hips (back then they didn't give 'ratings for grades of hips joint conformation just certify or dysplastic). I spent so much time with this dog and obtained his WCX and Canadian championship by age 13 months of age. I had decided to x-ray and get a preliminary evaluation on him at that time before investing another year in training and showing him but the reason I had even thought to do this then was someone had asked to use him at stud.

His x-ray evaluation came back as SEVERE BOTH HIPS and I was devastated. I found out weeks later that his mother had produced at least three dysplastic in every litter though I was never told this by the breeder before buying. I phoned them to tell them of the evaluation and asked IF they did replacements and they screamed "No, tough luck". I placed him with a local 'gentleman-hunter' who took excellent care of him, dried him after every swim and loved him to his death perfectly sound at age 14.

I read and studied and followed 'how had puppies graded from a sire and dam' in addition to ' they themselves being certified', realizing that OFA certification over generations DID improve the predictability for puppies in a litter. It IS our duty who 'make' puppies that are placed in pet homes, with companion-hunters and in homes where they will be bred someday themselves, to do everything in our power to make each generation better for physical soundness.

Hip dysplasia is a terrible genetic disease because of the various degrees of arthritis eventually produced leading to pain and debilitation. Bad biomechanics (or the way 'body parts' affect other parts during movement...), IS inherited. When the abnormally formed hip joint from hereditary damages the joint surface, lots of degenerative enzymes are released into the joint and causes the cartilage cushion to lose it's thickness and elasticity. This is very important to absorbing the shock during joint movement. Eventually, debris and harmful enzymes spill into the joint fluid affecting the joint's lubrication and the ability to block inflammatory cells, and then the ability of the joint fluid to nourish the cartridge is lost.

Cartlidge is also the critical material that attaches to the muscle. The loss of cartridge thickness as this process continues, allows joint fluid to contact the nerve endings in the bone, resulting in PAIN. The dog ultimately attempts to stabilize the joint and stop the PAIN by producing new bone at the edges of the joint surface becoming bone spurs (another diagnostic of hip dysplasia by OFA). The range of motion of the joint is eventually affected especially as the joint capsule thickens.

After I suffered through loving, hours and hours of training and the love that built during time before x-rays led to two other puppies grading dysplastic at a time when there was no OFA data base or personal computers; I had to rely on the information people gave me personally and their honesty as well. I discovered first-hand that breeders justified breeding dogs that did not OFA certify OR CHOSE NOT TO EVEN CHECK because they equated titles earned or quality in their eyes as reason to dismiss what OFA might reveal. I personally was involved with two such 'breeders' who attempted to cheat on OFA certification and were caught and banned from OFA for life. I doubt very much that that changed their continuing to breed Labradors and selling puppies to people like me who had hopes and dreams of working with healthy dogs.

I began a very strict policy of doing preliminary x-rays on every one of my dogs and puppies I placed with anyone who planned to breed those dogs. Between ten and twelve months of age, the joints are 80% of what they would be at age two years and so, prelims are done then on every puppy. This allows the breeder early selection of dogs for use as show/performance/breeding prospects as well as dogs best suited for pet homes. If a dog is found to be dysplastic or less than the grade I will accept at an early age, economic loss of raising, handling, showing etc., is reduced as well as the very real emotional loss reduced.

It IS absolute reliability of the preliminary evaluation of hip grade against the two-year OFA certification - There is a 100% reliability for a preliminary grade of 'excellent' being certified at two years (grading either excellent, good or fair). There is a 97.9% reliability for a preliminary grade of 'good' to certify at two and a 76.9% reliability for a preliminary grade of 'fair' for being normal at age two years.

Those who chose to breed our wonderful Labradors and place those puppies with buyers seeking pets, performance dogs and those to compete for titles and add to their own breeding programs absolutely MUST care about joint soundness for the life of these puppies produced. Breeders must also learn and care about the environmental factors that influence joint development also such as calorie intake avoiding at puppies and, the level of exercise for the developing puppy joints; my Receipt and Guarantee for my puppies includes an educational clause stating "The puppy will not be allowed to become overweight and, must only play/run with dogs of a similar size and weight until skeletal development is complete at approximately 12 months". \

Uninformed and inexperienced dog breeders may not be aware of this critical and absolute information regarding the importance of participating in screening for hip and elbow dysplasia. The fastest method of improving our dogs’ rate of improved joint status is not only breeding normal to normal but also OFA certified dogs to certified dogs with normal ancestors. THIS practice HAS INCREASED THE PERCENTAGE OF LABRADORS CLASSIFIED IWTH 'EXCELLENT' HIP STATUS AND A DECREASE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF DOGS CLASSIFIED AS HAVING HIP DYSPLASIA between 1970 and the early 1990's !

WHEN BREEDERS RECOGNIZE HIP DYSPLASIA AS A PROBLEM and ESTABLISH REDUCTION OF HD AS A PRIORITY, improvement of joint status is accomplished without jeopardizing other desirable traits. I will always suggest to those who inquire about puppies the need that they check pedigrees and verify documentation with the litter breeder and if such is not available, they should assume the worst until proven otherwise.