

GOOD DOG . . . SHOW DOG. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE? BY L. H. (BILL) GARNETT

Good dog . . . Show dog . . . Is there a difference? This debate has been raging for years. Why and what is it about the people involved in the sport of pure bred dogs that keep the flames of this enigma burning? In order to tap the root of this dilemma one must first understand the dynamics of the people and forces involved. To help accomplish that I have divide the participants into six respective groups in order to analyze their involvement and to understand how each group effects it's influence and what definitive role that group plays in the observation, Good dog . . . Show dog . . . Is there a difference?

Let us first attempt to identify these groups and then examine each one's influence as it relates to the question, Good dog . . . Show dog . . . Is there a difference? First: The In And Outers. Second: The Core Group. Third: The Meat Market Breeder. Fourth: The Overnight Experts. Fifth: the Politicians. Sixth: The Dedicated Dog People. Probably at this point some of you are saying, "what has this got to do with the . . . Good Dog . . . Show Dog debate?" Bear with me. The relevance will surface and I assure you the importance of identifying these groups is paramount to understanding the over all dynamics as they relate to and effect the sport of pure bred dogs.

GROUP 1: THE IN AND OUTERS. Some times they come and go so fast we never even knew they came through. Usually they acquire little knowledge and exert little or no influence on the sport. For the most part, theirs is but an involvement centered around their on dogs . . . dogs they more than likely bought from the MEAT MARKET BREEDER whom we will discuss later. One theory that usually explains this groups quick in and out is the fact that they usually are young, with young families, with limited disposable income and due to growing family needs its difficult for them to maintain a long term involvement. These In And Outers very seldom get caught up in the . . . Good dog . . . Show dog debate. For to them, one can understand, its really not all that important at that particular time in their lives. Often an In And Outer will surface at a later date, particularly after their lot in life has improved.

Interestingly enough there is another member of the in and out group who shows up and the very subject of this article dictates a short lived tenure. Why? Their's is an extremely interesting scenario. These people are normally successful in the particular endeavors, they do have disposable and by their very nature go about purchasing a dog somewhat intelligently and by the book. Their first objective is the get a good dog. Unfortunately they are laboring under the delusion that a good dog and a show dog are one in the same. And because of that they set out to purchase a standard conforming dog. They read, ask question and become somewhat knowledgeable regarding their breed. Armed with that knowledge and a good dog they can't wait to get in the fray.

What happens next is a rude awakening. They are shocked when their good dog is beaten by the so called show dog. A dog measuring a 4 or 5 on the conformation scale but elevated to an 8 or 9 because of something called "charisma." After about 25 to 30 shows these in and outers can usually come up with a more predictable and rewarding way to spend their weekends and

resources. Darting through the sport of pure bred dogs these people are usually the first to raise the question . . . Good dog . . . Show dog . . . is there a difference? They become confused by what they consider a double standard. Pardon the pun. They feel they were misled when told to purchase a standard conforming dog. They purchased a dog that conformed to the very standard sanctioned by the American Kennel Club. Their's was a 7 or 8 that was keenly intelligent, rock solid in it's temperament and was beaten by a 4 or 5 that did back flips and double jumps over a piece of liver. Good dog . . . Show dog is there a difference? You tell me how these people would answer!

GROUP 2: THE CORE GROUP. This is indeed an interesting collection of people who make up a simple majority of show people. These people love their dogs very much and enjoy one another for the most part. They devote a lot of time to their dogs and are extremely pleased when one of their number wins something. This is a plus in their experience and makes for an even better weekend. But, win or lose, they are back the next weekend enjoying the camaraderie of their friends and the pleasant surroundings that many of the dog show sites offer. Quite a number of this group know a good dog and part of their weekend experience is enhanced by their support of a good dog, even though it may belong to someone else. I personally have met a number of truly nice people from this group and have made lasting friendships. I've got to believe that the majority of this group would recognize and appreciate a good dog.

GROUP 3: THE MEAT MARKET BREEDER. This group runs the gamut. First, is the back yard breeder who is not at all interested in the good dog . . . show dog debate. Their only interest is that the dog can be registered and therefore it is a show dog! This part of the meat market group is usually the one that catches the unsuspecting in and out and helps hasten his or her exit. Their members are usually found lurking in the classifieds, on grocery store bulletin boards and the counters of veterinarian offices. They border on fraud and feast on ignorance. The one positive that results in doing business with these people is that the puppy usually gets a better home than it had.

The other part of this group has a higher calling. They subscribe to the theory that the more you swing the better your chances of hitting a home run. The more puppies you put on the ground the better the chance of breeding a good one. This segment sometimes catches the re-entry of an "in or out" and because he is now paying more for his dog he feels his lot in the sport of pure bred dogs has greatly improved, for now he is "connected." Many thousands of dollars later he is off again searching for a more rewarding way to spend his weekend and resources. Like their back yard breeding cousins, this segment of the meat market group is never caught up in the good dog . . . show dog debate. Their prime concern is to sell puppies, wins of any kind, and finish dogs of any quality. All this helps to perpetuate the myth that they know what they are doing. Good dog . . . show dog this, this group couldn't care less.

GROUP 4: THE OVERNIGHT EXPERTS. This group of people develops innocently enough. They usually have the good fortune of starting out with a good dog or show dog. They don't know which. All they know is that this dog wins. As the dog win a strange metamorphosis takes place. People begin to talk to them about their dog and how well it is doing. Buoyed by their newfound popularity, the overnight experts begin to expound on the theories of kinetic and static energy, the dynamics of gait, the effects of lateral displacement and the proposition that show dogs are born and not bred . . . or whatever. Before long they have acquired quite a following of people who are less knowledgeable but who want to be associated with a winner. The more the wins. The bigger the following gets, until on day the breed has a full blown monster on it's hands. Sound familiar? Up to this point the debate over good dog . . . show dog hasn't been too important to the overnight expert. But now he must decide which does he does he have and that decision will influence him the rest of his dog involvement life. The chances of him going the "good dog route", according to my abacus, is about 5 to 1.

GROUP 5: THE POLITICIANS. This group exerts more influence on the sport of pure dogs than all the other groups combined. They make no bones about it. They hail the show dog as their icon and build temples in his image. The promotion of their icon ranks second only to General Motor's introduction of a new car. Their insatiable appetite to win and devour others is equaled by no other creature that has ever stalked this earth. This type "A" carnivore leaves no rock unturned in its search of a win and no relationship is too dear not to attempt to exert their influence or manipulative persuasion.

I've seen the politician wait an hour in the cold or rain of a show day morning to "accidentally" to cross the path of an arriving judge. I've over heard the politician while he cleverly castrated a competitor's dog's chances to win under a judge through his subtle barbs. I've seen the politician armed with a fist full of assignments club a judge into submissiveness. And I've heard the politician's attempts to influence his breed club in such a way that it enhanced his dog's chances of winning. And then he was applauded for his efforts and involvement!

In some ways the politician is absolutely brilliant in his quest for the top show dog. But I'm getting somewhat of afield. Ask the politician as to what his thoughts are concerning the good dog . . . show dog debate. Without a doubt he wants the show dog for this is how he plays the game. The talk gets him into the game. The better the show dog . . . the better he can play he game. If that's confusing, let me explain it another way. If by chance the show dog is a good dog then the politician has the edge over the other show dog politicians.

Why is the show dog so important to the politician? Its kind of simple. By his very nature the politician is intimidating. Couple that intimidating nature with a judge lacking in knowledge or intestinal fortitude and you've got the perfect environment for the politician to operate. The judge sees a sterling performance, he is reassured by the politician's bravado . . . its a walk stroll in the park. It happens often in one form or another, some more subtle than others. Good dog . . . show dog is there a difference? Ask he politician . . . he'll take the show dog every time.

GROUP 6: DEDICATED DOG PEOPLE. This group consist of the most bizarre collection of people that one could ever imagine. Doctors, lawyers, indian chiefs, firemen, salesmen, housewives, artist, retirees, college professors, community leaders, farmers, ranchers, truck drivers, policemen and phds. You name it . . . they're all in this group . . . all with a single purpose in mind . . . all tied together by a common thread . . . all with the same goal . . . to breed or own a near perfect specimen of their particular breed.

It's a marvelous patchwork quilt of many mind sets and backgrounds, all fiercely competitive but respectful of each other's dreams and accomplishments. Their dedication and sincerity of effort is overwhelming. Good dog . . . Show dog which would this group take? I would guarantee that almost to man or woman they would take the good dog and then try to make it better. Their earnest desire is to leave a foundation upon which the next generation of dedicated dog people can build in the never ending quest for the "great one." This quest will go on forever by these dedicated dog people. They'll never stop dreaming the dream . . . they'll never give up . . . they will not be deterred. Not by the back yard breeder, not by the numbers players, not by the overnight experts and certainly not by the politicians. Their's is a singled minded quest driven by a desire that not even they can explain. They dream the dream of the great one while at work, at home, going to their weddings, their children's weddings, in the grocery store lines, on the golf course, on vacation, in the hospital, wherever they are! You ask these dreamers if there is a difference between a good dog and a show dog and they'll tell you to a man that a good dog lasts forever while a show dog is but a fleeting moment in the passing of time. A good Doberman Pinscher is a square, compact, medium size dog of balanced proportions, noble in it's carriage, courageous by nature and sound of mind, body and joints. If he or she can pass on those nine traits to his or her prodgeny then history will remember him or her . . . as a great one! To the dedicated dog person . . . nothing could be more exciting or wonderful than to have bred or owned one of those good Dobermans that became great.

At this time I would like to share with you something that has played an important role in my approach to the evaluation of Doberman Pinschers as it relates to being a conformation judge. This is something that I have read many times, something that I feel may once and for all lay to rest the debate "Good Dog . . . Show Dog" or, as some may argue, "Conformance vs. Performance." Please don't read it just once but several times. And I promise you, each time you do, new meanings will surface. Trust me, its a world of form and function of beauty and symmetry of balance and soundness . . . once you've mastered it . . . the reality is euphoric

"If we want an ornament there is no reason why we shouldn't have one. If we want a field dog or just something that our neighbor doesn't have, that's our privilege. Yet the clock has to keep on ticking; the structural or working parts, whether for toy or giant, must fit together and work in a manner that is the least tiring, most graceful and efficient in movement. These parts, unassembled, can be blue printed and studied for mechanical efficiency, which would give a clearer understanding of the part and its relation to its component. We can not recognize the weak parts unless we recognize what makes them weak, and what mechanical change might compensate for or correct the problem.

Though we can not put a dog together like we do a bridge, we have put him

together by our choice of his ancestors and made him big or little, long or short, fluffy or wirehaired and sometimes we have not been to wise in our selection of it's parts. Our domestic animals are handicapped by the fact that we force their parts upon them and preserve the bad along with the good.

The animals of the wild, as complete species, have been more fortunate because of that great selection process known as the survival of the fittest.

When our ancestors first developed the breed that we fell in love with, they had experience a field to guide them so that they could cull the efficient performers from those that didn't do so well. This accounts for the quality that has been handed down to us in our dogs. In the main we lack the experience or even the opportunity to observe performance so that we can measure the advantages and maintain the quality that has been given us.

Our only recourse, is to figure out what the part does, how it works and what makes the difference between the good and the bad or more specifically, what is good and what is bad. Maybe such a study does loom as tiresomely academic, but so were the bridge and golf lessons that took us out of the dull class. Just as it is more important to play any game well, you will likely find it more fun breeding dogs as they should be, as to take a chance on uncertain luck. Besides this is one way of having something that your neighbor does not posses." (McDowell Lyons, The Dog In Action, pp. 24 - 25.)

So what is the point that I'm trying to make? Are we being mislead as to what is important? Is conformation indeed losing out to performance? Are we not suppose to reward dogs based on how closely they conform to their standard? Are we not, as judges, supposed to start a show day by finding the best "standard conforming" dog in each breed? Are we not entrusted with the future of the breed and complemented by every specialty assignment? Or, are we all victims of the same middle class mentality . . . I've got mine, my dogs finish, what do I care, I'm not getting involved. If there's a problem let the next guy handle it.

Please don't let the Good Dog be beaten by the Show Dog and not question why. And don't accept the canned responses "he really asked for it" or "he went around the ring like a stallion" or "he never put a foot down wrong." Press, in a polite manner, at a convenient time, never argumentatively, ask for a more precise explanation. If we don't understand, we must question. How else are we to learn? No one is the beginning or the end of anything. Each and every one of us is accountable . . . for we are only as insignificant as we allow ourselves to be.

"The DOBERMAN PINSCHER is a square, compact, medium size dog of balanced proportions, noble in it's carriage, courageous by nature and SOUND of mind, body and joints." . . . Bill Garnett