



Do I REALLY Want to Breed My Dog?

What could be better than having a wonderful litter of puppies by breeding your lovely Border Collie female; perhaps nothing, but you could be heading for disaster. Here are some points to consider before you breed your bitch.

1) Why do you want to breed your dog? If you knew ahead of time that your dog would die from complications, would you still breed her? Hopefully, your answer is an emphatic, "No!"

2) How old is your bitch? Ideally, no bitch should be bred prior to two years of age. If she is older (five or six) and has never been bred, there is greater risk of losing her and/or the pups.

Many things can go wrong during a pregnancy, labor, and whelping. Perinatal care in humans is rigorous due to some of the same complications. In dogs, it happens far more often than people know. Bitches can suffer uterine infections, uterine torsion and a whole host of other equally serious conditions. If you're not prepared financially or emotionally for a Cesarean Section, then you should not breed. Birth defects and infections can destroy an entire litter, a litter which you may have to assume responsibility for euthanizing.

Breeding is not for the faint of heart, so if you cannot face the loss of your bitch and/or her puppies, or cannot afford the financial outlay to save them, you should seriously rethink your plan.

3) Can you find good, quality homes for the pups? The average Border Collie litter is five to seven pups, but nine is not unheard of. Do not count on past comments or expressions of interest from friends, family, and acquaintances to take a pup. Their situations may have radically changed or they may have already acquired another dog. Those adorable bundles of joy are

soon going to become very busy and demanding adolescents in need of care and an outlet for their energy.

Consider the fact that the Border Collie, although a lovely companion as well as working dog, is not for everyone. Many people base their impressions of the BC on what they see on television or in the movies. Fly, the wonderful dog in the movie, "BABE"; the BC doing tai chi in the park; the incredible frisbee, flyball, and agility dogs featured on ESPN and Animal Planet; while we know the years of training instilled in these dogs, many prospective buyers do not consider this when looking for their family pet. How well has your prospect researched the breed? Is their home and family life prepared for the pup and its activity? A few questions on your part can help prevent disaster for the BC placed in the wrong home.

Are you prepared to take back a pup, perhaps after it has become neurotic or obsessive compulsive, for lack of appropriate activity, and in need of major rehabilitation?

Good breeders are responsible for the pup its entire life and have a "first right of refusal" clause in their contract. Consider what happens to the pup you've placed with the person who finds the dog obnoxious and puts it in rescue, or dumps it at a shelter. If a dog has strong herding lines in its background it may not be suitable as a pet, particularly in a neighborhood. If this dog doesn't have stock to work, then it will work what is available: bicycles, small children, cats and automobiles. Remember that strongly driven BCs, without work, can become destructive. Early socialization is a must particularly for those placed as pets with goals toward performance venues. Keep this in mind when placing your pups.

Is your bitch worthy of breeding? It may be helpful for you to seek out a mentor; someone who has been involved in the breed and breeding for a while and who could advise you, not only about your dog, but about possible mates for her. Your breeder, local kennel club, professional structure mentor or professional handler may all be good places to start to look for help. When considering a breeding:

a) You need to be aware of your dog's strong and weak points as they compare to the breed standard found on the AKC website www.akc.org.

b) You want to choose a mate that hopefully will correct her weaknesses with his strengths. Look at your dog with as objective an eye as possible. While all dogs have some conformation flaw or other, are hers minor or egregious? What are her outstanding virtues that make perpetuating her line desirable?

c) Preserving the herding instinct and work ethic of the bred is just as important as preserving the physical characteristics and trial ability of the BC. Take the time to put your dog on sheep to make certain the herding instinct is strong. Your dog should have worked stock enough to determine that she has proper eye, covering ability, keenness, and biddability. These dogs were originally bred in the border counties between England and Scotland and were expected to cover rugged terrain. They also worked a large area and needed to be able to cover a lot of ground quickly while maintaining a nice, steady pace.

Convinced that your dog's conformation and herding instinct are of quality? It's now time to take a look at her current health and genetic history. Your dog should have health certificates from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (**OFA**) and the Canine Eye Research Foundation (**CERF**). For the OFA rating, you will need to take your dog to a veterinarian for x-rays of the hips and elbows. The x-rays will

be sent to OFA, along with the required fee. The certificate is usually sent to you within three weeks. Be prepared to have your dog sedated or given general anesthesia for this procedure.

For the CERF certificate, you will need to take your dog to a canine ophthalmologist for an eye examination. The specialist will check for any eye abnormalities and will give you a form to send to CERF. The current fee is \$15 to obtain the certificate; the exam is additional. BAER (brainstem auditory evoked response) testing is another recommendation to be sure your dog has the appropriate tonal range.

The next step is to obtain DNA testing from Optigen. We are fortunate to have blood tests that can tell us if our dogs are carriers of the genetic illnesses that have affected our breed. One such illness is Collie Eye Anomaly (**CEA**), and another is Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (**NCL**). On the Optigen website (www.optigen.com) you will find all the information necessary to obtain the tests. You will need to have blood drawn and detailed instructions as to the amount and packaging of the blood are available on the website. In addition to your vet's charges, Optigen charges between \$180.00 to \$225.00, per test per dog.

Also test for Trapped Neutrophil Syndrome (**TNS**). Unfortunately this test is not yet available through Optigen, but if you are considering breeding your dog to a known carrier, Dr. Alan Wilton in Sydney, Australia will test your dog in exchange for a donation to his research program. **If your dog has hip or elbow dysplasia or abnormal results for any of the tests, it is not advisable to breed.** All of the above mentioned conditions are carried by autosomal recessive genes; both parents have to be carriers in order to

produce the illness. One parent carrier will not produce the conditions, but you do run the risk of approximately one-half of the litter being carriers as well. This adds an additional element of difficulty in placing pups, particularly with those who want breeding rights. If you do not perform DNA testing on the pups before placement, you should require a spay/neuter contract and provide limited registration of the pups. Owners can still participate in AKC venues (except conformation), but no litters can be registered from those dogs.

In your search for an appropriate stud dog, consider carefully your dog's hip and eye ratings as well as the DNA results and list any genetic anomalies of which your dog is a carrier. You will need to find a stud dog that is clear in those areas and that compliments your bitch. You have already evaluated her strengths and weaknesses so look for a male who will help you to sustain her virtues and improve on her faults. Look carefully at pedigrees and consider the health history of the dogs that are behind your dog as well as the stud dog you are considering. If you do not understand a pedigree, ask your mentor for help. You will also want to see copies of the health certificates and DNA results for the stud.

a) Once you have decided on a stud dog, you will require testing for any sexually transmitted diseases in addition to brucellosis. It is a common thought that brucellosis is solely an STD, but is actually transmitted through exchange of body fluid, including a dog licking up urine. The stud dog owner will want to see a brucellosis test on your bitch that has been done within the last 30 days. Talk to other breeders who have used the stud you have chosen and

inquire as to the success of the breeding and quality of the litter.

- b) Be certain that you discuss stud fees and requirements with the owner **BEFORE** the breeding takes place. Some owners simply charge a flat fee, but some want a puppy back or they want a fee and a puppy.
- c) Decide whether you are going to send your bitch to the stud dog for breeding, or if you would rather have semen collected and sent to you. Whatever you decide, have a written contract that both you and the stud dog owner have agreed upon and signed **BEFORE** you go any farther.

An average stud fee is \$1,000 and can go up or down from there depending on the dog you have chosen. Consider, too, the cost of transportation or the vet costs for an artificial insemination (AI). The AI will require several rounds of progesterone tests, which can cost between \$45 and \$85 each. Be prepared to have several of these tests, as an AI requires perfect timing. You will need to find a vet that is a reproductive specialist for best results. Costs for health clearances, stud fee, post natal care, puppy eye exams, initial shots, worming, and vet charges will range between \$3,800 and \$4,500. If you consider that you will spend three hours per day caring for and socializing puppies (and that's a very conservative estimate) you will have invested 252 man hours if all the pups are placed by 12 weeks of age. If you manage to profit \$1,000 on your litter, that breaks down to \$3.97 per hour or pay below the minimum wage. If extra money is your goal, breeding dogs is not the solution. **The only good reason for breeding is to improve upon what you already have.**