

Are we destroying our breed?

About Barbara Turpin (CA)

Barbara Turpin and is a third generation dog breeder. Under the kennel name “Of Course,” her family’s Whippets are known for being true dual purpose dogs.

Ms. Turpin has had Rhodesian Ridgebacks since 1995 and still holds fast to the family legacy of breeding dogs that are well able to perform the function for which they were bred. She was a panelist at the 2004 World Congress on the subject of Breed Specific Legislation, started the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of Canada, has written numerous breed-related articles, is a past rescue coordinator and is a “Dogs in Canada” photography contest winner. She is also a novice judge, handling coach, doggy doula and self-taught canine herbalist.

Of Course Rhodesian Ridgebacks are known internationally as dynamic movers, dedicated performance dogs, excellent producers, and consistent winners in local shows as well as breed specialties. Of Course get is seen world wide succeeding in the show ring, on the coursing field, in obedience competitions, working as therapy dogs, doing scent work and even in Iron Dog competitions. Refusing fads, Ms. Turpin’s dogs are typically true wheaten, standard size and nearly always naughty.

Abstract

Are we destroying our breed for the sake of its name?

Constructive self-reflection has the potential to produce new, amazing futures not normally considered. Possessing methods of practice such as the law of Mendelian genetics, statistical projections of probable outcomes, and (perhaps most importantly) drawing on the experiences of others, allows breeders to make new choices.

The ridge is a cosmetic feature. There is no reliable data supporting the contrary. And yet, is the importance placed on the ridge damaging our breed? Today, fanciers and judges routinely forgive structural flaws for the sake of the ridge, when the greater merit is in forgiving ridge flaws for the sake of structure.

Before jumping to conclusions, it’s important to note that this presentation in no way currently advocates breeding for anything but a correct ridge. However, removing anomalously ridged dogs from the gene pool for fear of incorrect ridges is an erroneous position.



By employing techniques such as cross fault breeding, establishing patterns and probable outcomes, and collecting accurate data from other breeders means there is an opportunity for more structural conformity in this wonderful breed.

A Rhodesian Ridgeback, first and foremost, must be able to perform the functions for which they were bred. These functions and related attributes include:

- an effortless, ambling gait of maximum propulsion with minimal effort
- aerobic endurance provided by robust lung capacity and proper supporting structures
- a strong, yet pliable, foundation of inordinately resilient feet

- colour that both blends in with that of the Savanna and also repels a hot sun
- quick wit, along with split second reactive agility (that also makes for great photo opportunities!)
- proper angles that provide optimal suspension while reducing the potential for impact injuries
- healthy bones, joints and systems

Of the three ridged breeds today - the Rhodesian Ridgeback, Thai Ridgeback Dog and Phu Quoc Ridgeback - ours is the only one that restricts accepted ridges to just one. In a time when trailblazers in other breeds are getting out ahead of genetic bottleneck issues, is it time to have a conversation about expanding allowable ridge types?

Trends unfettered continue. We see the result of this phenomenon in breeds such as the German Shepherd Dog. By allowing significant structural flaws into our show rings and breeding programs, for the sake of a single ridge type, are we heading down a path of destruction from which there may be no return?

Genetic diversification measures in other breeds include going out completely to another breed. Should this be necessary in the Rhodesian Ridgeback, which breed is the ideal outcross? There is one school of thought that suggests familial outcross. Namely, by going back into the breed’s ancestry and selecting a breed that contributed to the creation of the breed initially. Another school of thought is to select a breed that is the polar opposite of the original breed. Upon discussion with other fanciers a very interesting suggestion emerged as the Rhodesian Ridgeback’s opposite: The Samoyed.

With animal rights groups gaining more and more mileage (and support?) in the mainstream media, will breeders of the future be forced into genetic diversification if Coefficients of Inbreeding (COIs) are too high? Is it time for the Rhodesian Ridgeback community to create a model of breeding practices that includes sound cross fault breeding of ridges and setting a recommended ceiling of COIs that are acceptable?

In light of the information breeders have at their fingertips, there is only one reason to exclude anomalously ridged dogs from a breeding program. Attend this presentation to discover the reason and have the boundaries of your breeding comfort zones gently pushed.



