

THE PARENT CLUB

DILEMMA



“THE PARENT CLUB DILEMMA IS INDICATIVE OF SOMETHING DETRIMENTAL THAT I SEE IN THE DOG SPORT TODAY: **EXCLUSIVITY.**”

EXCLUSIVITY CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF PUREBRED DOGS

BY DOUG JOHNSON

I’ve struggled with parent clubs for decades, mainly because, as breeders, our mental processes, goals, and methods can be different than the parent clubs’ and we don’t always align.

A few years back, a prominent handling team was denied membership to their breed’s parent club. Jamie and I most recently have also been turned down for membership from a parent club, and in disclosing this I have learned of many who have also been refused entry to parent club organizations. So, this is a topic I’ve been thinking about for 18 months or more, and I have concluded that there is a dilemma between serving a parent club and the parent club serving us. Furthermore, I know many successful breeders who serve their breed better than those who work as guards in parent clubs. Perhaps, NOT being a member does have advantages.

We know that when someone starts to research a breed, they are directed to the parent club. Back in the day, we wrote letters to join the parent club, but now the parent clubs are online and there is more information readily available to people. The parent club really was the go-to spot to start for many of us. I joined the Clumber Spaniel Club in 1984 and now am a life member.

Now, I wonder, how do people get sponsors to join a parent club when they are new? Why does the club require them? What is the fear of letting someone in? What are the criteria for membership? How can a club teach or show you the way when you are excluded as a member? Are they afraid that someone will volunteer too much? Animal abuse/cruelty would be reasons for not allowing a prospective member, but I can’t think of any others.

The parent club dilemma is indicative of something detrimental that I see in the dog sport today: **exclusivity**. We see cliques develop, where people want to be part of an exclusive group, the popular group, the “in” crowd. This exclusivity of factions is a taught and learned behavior that happens in dog clubs and the sport of purebred dogs just as it happens in life outside of the sport. (In school, we wanted to be part of the good table at lunch.) As a result, we have become less and less inclusive of outsiders. Sometimes we do this as protection, for fear of the AR people getting involved or being judged for what we do. But we have to be mindful that this exclusivity is also detrimental to the advancement of dogs. It closes doors to endless possibilities.

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One obvious case of exclusivity in the sport is the process of limited registrations. At the beginning, we thought this was a great thing! It protected our kennel and our dogs. Today, in retrospect, I'm not so sure it would fly as much. We now realize that what we did was eliminate animals as potential breeding stock, and they may have been the ones that should have been bred from. (Keep in mind, we can never know what someone else will be able to do with our dogs in their breeding program.) We do get proprietary. We start to have success, we close down, and we shut off competition by maintaining a breeding force of our own until we start to realize, wait a minute, we've closed every door. Now we have to reopen, and in reopening ourselves we've got to regain the trust of those people we shut out. That's hard to do.

There can come a time when you run into a crossroad with a parent club, when it has become the albatross of the breed and is not serving the needs of the breed. Instead, it's maybe serving only those in power at the time. Perhaps it is influenced by a kennel or a breeder, a dominant, vocal force that has made a powerful Board to do the “work” of the parent club but also ends up being self-serving. I think that's where some parent clubs go wrong. Members are oftentimes passive and not able to organize together to balance the powers of a strong-willed, close Board.

Often, there is an old guard represented on a Board, or officers that stand in the way of some forward progress for many breeders. These folks resist some process improvement that certainly needs to happen. (When will they update those Standing rules? Is it time to make another policy?) There have been so many positive changes to the sport and to breeding in the past decades that clubs must try to adapt or be left behind. There can be a mentality among many long-term club members that “this is how things are done” and “we've always done it this way.” When a change is proposed, it is often initially hard to get people to accept it, but after the club takes the plunge it's usually well received. That's the other side of this... it's just getting to that other side of this exclusivity dilemma!!! Results! Change is too often resisted favoring the consistent (even if poorly executed) tried and true plan. New and improved can be rewarding beyond measure and will result in inclusivity!

In the end, who does a parent club serve? Can you, or do you, outgrow the parent club? Can you become so successful that the parent club becomes a rather small entity and your profile as a breeder is so much bigger? Do they underperform as an organization

designed to protect and preserve? That's my expectation of what I think a parent club should do. A parent club is supposed to protect the breed and preserve the breed. Can they be misguided? Do they make mistakes? I think they can. Maybe it's time we ask ourselves: “Does my parent club have the same value it once had?”

For our sport to grow and thrive, we must open the door and let people in. Bring people into the fold and learn the joys of the sport. My plea to all show-giving clubs is to work at creating an event for the day of your show. Shows need to reinvent reasons to enter beyond the opportunity to garnish a point or two. We need clubs to add to their day's educational opportunities, or include FSS competitions, a hound bench show, or grooming competitions. Add speakers and seminars. There are many new and different ideas to showcase the purebred dog that will entice and attract some much-needed new energy to some of our old traditions. Most newer people to the sport require more to do in a day than the 3-5 minutes of judging time.

Together we can come full-circle as members of an organization and do a better job of outreach to those wanting and WILLING to get involved. Open the door, open your club, and open your minds to much-needed progress. The end result is for the greater good and the betterment of all purebred dogs. We never know who is out there trying to get in and what they can do for you, the parent club, or the breed. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Breeding under the world-famous Clussexx prefix, Doug Johnson has produced more than 250 AKC Champions. Dogs from his kennel have won more than 175 Best in Show awards and 18 National Specialties across four breeds. Mr. Johnson holds the distinct honor of producing two Westminster Best in Show winners, and he is the only breeder of Westminster Best in Show winners in two different breeds. He is approved to judge five Groups in the AKC system; all Sporting, Hound, Working, Toy, and Non-Sporting. He has had the privilege of judging at some of the most prestigious shows in the AKC system. A founder in the Canine Conservation movement, Mr. Johnson strives to be a voice for all breeders who work tirelessly to produce and promote their breed of choice. He believes, “Advocating for dogs is a passion, but also a responsibility to ensure the successful longevity of unique breeds. Together, we must continue to foster the best breeding practices to keep breeds from extinction.”