

Extract from:

The Police Dog: History, Breeds and Service

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Chapter 15

Emergence of the Breed

In the world of television, the Sunday comics and the movies men coexisted and interacted with dinosaurs, but in reality there were seventy million years between the passing of the last dinosaur and the first upright creature in any way resembling modern man. In a similar way these venues often depict primitive man as having canine companions, but the early evidence is sparse. The famous cave drawings in Europe, relatively recent, perhaps only 10,000 to 30,000 years old, show no dogs or domestic animals of any sort. Current scientific thinking is that the dog emerged from an intermediate, self-domesticated population or species at the earliest perhaps 13,000 years ago, which would mean that dogs did not exist prior to the beginnings of agriculture and village life, and that subsequent specialized canine populations, the first primitive breeds, evolved by natural selection, that is because men favored them in feeding or drove out or culled undesirable pups and young dogs rather than active human intervention in selecting which male bred the female.

Scientific knowledge of the evolution of the human and canine partnership, the use of the domestic animal and the herding way of life and the spread of agriculture, has moved rapidly over the past several decades, and remains in a state of flux. The migration of the human race and the domestic canine to the Americas is a case in point, for the current view, based on extensive genetic and archeological analysis, is that the American Indians brought their dogs with them from Asia, that there never was any domestication from the wolf or coyote in America. (These genetic studies indicate that the dogs of the North American Indians virtually disappeared in a genetic and practical sense, that Indian breeds being marketed today were created from combinations of European canines coming over with the European migrations.)

The time lines are complex, for solid evidence for the widespread existence of the domestic dog goes back no more than twelve to fifteen thousand years, the same general time period for the earliest Indians. Further research may well push either or both of these estimates further back into the past. This is not a real problem in that if the human migration to the Americas predated canine domestication it would simply mean that the dogs came in with subsequent migrations and spread across the continent. This would be similar to the situation in Australia, where the Dingo was not present until thousands of years after the first men arrived.

Domestication

Among the earliest adaptations of the primitive canine for specialized, cooperative existence was likely the herding of semi-domesticated animals. Sheep and goats are generally accepted as the first domesticated animals after the dog, and the preexisting partnership played a key role in the process. It would seem likely, with humans and dogs continually on the move, that there was little opportunity for breeding selection, the bitches in heat being serviced by the dogs available and acceptable to the bitch herself. Human involvement could have been

mostly by feeding and providing for those found useful and abandoning, culling or driving off those which were not. According to Coppinger (Coppinger & Coppinger, 2001) this mode of propagation is still typical in many regions from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees among sheep guardian dogs and herds continually on the move even today. An intermediate stage with some individuals in a population living more or less independently and some having bonds with humans seems likely, even necessary. Regional types, dogs adapted by structure, character and trainability for the particular regional needs of farmers, stockmen and others, evolved and were perpetuated in many places and times according to local circumstances.

As man became more well established in crop tending and evolved more elaborate farms and villages, breeding selection, actual human determination of which males were bred to a bitch, choosing the best workers to procreate, would at some point gradually have become common practice. In general breeding selections were according to the expectation of more effective working dogs, and the abstract concept of purity in breeding would have seemed strange and perhaps even outlandish, for a dog was what he did in his work, not who his ancestors were. Even today most real herdsman, shepherds and large segments of the Dutch Police community make breeding selections in exactly this way. These evolving processes went on across the world for the better part of ten thousand years, perhaps more according to how one marks the beginning.

The Purebred Dog

During the latter portion of the nineteenth century, the period after 1850, Europeans and later Americans with leisure and means increasingly bred restricted pools of dogs for style and appearance to establish formal breeds and created kennel clubs to maintain records of descent. Shepherds had maintained local and regional lines of dogs for centuries for use in their pastures, and such dogs in Germany for instance would most naturally have been thought of and described as German shepherd's dogs. But in this new world of kennel clubs, trophies and ribbons this was not to be enough. No, to be a German Shepherd Dog with capital letters there would need to be a number written down in a book, with a fancy kennel name the dog would never know or respond to.

In time it came to pass that many dogs in the fields herding sheep or guarding cattle, as their ancestors had for generations and centuries, were not to be Collies or German Shepherd Dogs with the capital letters, and many "real" Collies or German Shepherd Dogs with a number, a kennel name and numerous ribbons, trophies and photographs in fashionable canine magazines would be out of place, perhaps terrified, in a world with actual, living sheep, cattle or threatening marauders of every species, man and beast.

This freshly minted canine nobility was given a novel name to reflect their newfound superiority; they were henceforth to be known as "purebred." And instead of casual references to known ancestors, of use in functional breeding selection, these purebred dogs were to have a pedigree, often elaborately inscribed on fancy paper or parchment, with numbers and designations of champions and an embossed seal.

Each new breed in its own turn became the occasion for a new mythology, it somehow came to pass that these special dogs were in fact ancient and noble, had been there for generations and centuries, just waiting to be discovered by some nice European hobbyists and inscribed in an appropriate book of origins. And conferences of hobbyists would gather to pool their wisdom and create, write down and propagate a standard of excellence, a guide for future generations of judges, for this newly discovered ancient breed.

In the beginning, the founding stock was chosen, numbered and inscribed in this book of origins, to be the common ancestry for all time. Should a member of this race or breed happen to copulate with any other kind of dog, even related dogs of the same function, region and background, the pups produced would be denied respectability with all of the intensity reserved for bastard human beings produced without the blessing of a clerical ceremony for the unfortunate and misguided parents.

Certainly such dogs could not be purebred, and derogatory expressions such as mutt, mongrel and crossbreed came into use to convey the shame of their very existence. Registration became the new mantra for respectability, and the fundamental mission of every kennel club came to be propaganda enforcing this standard of propriety, ingraining the concept that until money was sent for registration, like an offering to the gods, the new pup was not really what the responsible, respectable family wanted to have making puddles on the living room carpet.

Thus came to pass the canine breed in the formal, modern sense, emerging as a closed population of dogs employing breeding selection to establish commonality of appearance and competence in a specific function, such as pointing or retrieving in the hunting breeds or patrol work in the police breeds. But, somehow, the focus on function was always lost in the process.

The Dog Show

The foundation of breed creation and ongoing direction is the conformation show, the formal process of gathering together dogs for evaluation and rank ordering according to faithfulness to a hypothetical breed standard of excellence, so as to lend guidance to breeding selection. The creation process of each breed involves conjuring up a founding mythology, the participants generally emerging as breed authorities and often in control of conformation show selection in the formative years. These shows often produced written critiques of the individual dogs, generally printed in a magazine or journal and influential in the community at large.

Max von Stephanitz for the German Shepherd and Dr. Reul for the Belgian Shepherd are primary examples and illustrate differing outcomes. Von Stephanitz produced a large, influential and comprehensive book and was the dominant figure for forty years. Dr. Reul was influential over a much briefer time period, passing away in 1907, and the club he founded did not predominate in the long term. This was a contributing but in my opinion not a predominant factor in the early popularity and commercial success of the German Shepherd relative to the Belgian Shepherds. The common thread is that the greatest influence of these two men was through personal control of the influential conformation shows in the formative years, which was the mechanism by which they stamped their vision of the breed on the founding stock and thus the direction of the founding lines.

The conformation show was and is by its nature an inherently political process, a competition for prestige and the promotion of personal concepts of the ideal and the advancement of one's own breeding lines or preferences. Almost universally an unforeseen consequence has been the abandonment of the practical or working functionality of the breed, with prestige and breeding preference going to the conformation show winners with little regard for character or work. Very often this results in splitting the breed into increasingly divergent lines, those emphasizing appearance as evaluated in the show ring and those selected for increasing competence in the actual functional role of the breed. The lines selected according to conformation tended to become ornamental in the sense of emphasis on extremes of physique, rendering the dogs physically less and less capable of the breed function.

Kennel clubs have emerged as bloated bureaucratic propaganda machines, gone to great length to encourage widespread pet ownership and participation in the hobby of dog showing, spending weekends fluffing and puffing on the grooming tables in hope that their gait and bait performance will result in the magic, dramatic pointing of the finger, encouraging them to write even more checks for professional handlers, dog show entries and elaborate magazine ads so the other judges will come to know know where the correct finger points.

In evolving into a sport, an end in itself, the dog show has become a process of taking type to extreme, as we have seen in the steeply sloping top lines, extreme rear angulation and slinking around the ring in the German Shepherd or the monstrosities paraded as Bulldogs which can hardly waddle up to the food dish. Closer to my home, the process has also overtaken the Bouvier des Flandres, with the emphasis on short backs, wide shoulders and deep chests, accentuated with ever longer and softer hair to sculpt the massive appearance, dogs which can hardly stumble around the ring without stepping on themselves.

In time the dog show became the preeminent arena of quality; on appointed days, usually a weekend, large elements of the show dog community arise early to fluff and groom their dogs, often with elaborate coiffures, and make their way to the appointed ring, where the judge, a man or woman with correct manners, social position and political connections, would commence the elaborate ceremony of stacking, baiting and gaiting the dogs, ultimately leading to the dramatic moment when the judge, with a well-practiced flourish, points his finger at the winning dogs, taking them a step closer to greatness in the fantasy world of the show dog. In time, particularly in America, this often became too demanding for mere mortals, and a class of professional handlers emerged to ensure the correctness of the ceremony, and to ensure that the judge would recognize the importance of the dog at the end of their lead. Nowhere in the process is there any real concern with the actual functionality of a breed, the ability to herd, search or protect, or with physical characteristics such as stamina, power and agility, or moral attributes of courage, trainability and desire for the human working partnership.

In the beginning the emphasis was on the dogs of the more upwardly mobile, the emerging middle and commercial classes, or those with such aspirations, particularly the hunting dogs. In Belgium, most of the early magazine articles, even for the working herding dogs, such as the Malinois and the Bouviers, were in a magazine called *Chase et Peche*, or in English *Hunting and Fishing*.

A little later, about the turn of the twentieth century, other men, often a little less genteel and socially prominent, began to seek out the dogs of the country side, the farmer's and herder's dogs, in order to establish their own breeds. Veterinarians, perhaps the best-educated and most literate men routinely out and about in the farm country, were often prominent in leadership roles.

Herding trials were successfully popularized in the British Isles, and remain so today. A small number of herding trials were held in Belgium and other areas in the late 1800s, proved much less popular. Beginning about 1900 the emphasis was increasingly on the police dog trial, particularly in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. From the very beginning there was tension among the advocates of the police breeds between the upwardly mobile who tended to seek acceptance and a place in the higher-class show dog world and those who regarded the working trial as the primary arena of excellence. This fundamental conflict, this difference in values, is at the heart of the strife and anger that characterizes the world of the working breeds even to this day.

In the English-speaking world there were no serious working trials other than herding, and the obedience competition emerged even later, well after the first world war. In time many or most conformation shows allocated rings on the periphery

where dogs not evaluated as of show potential, pet quality, were trained for dreary obedience events.

But there was trouble in this paradise. The thirst for fashion and novelty in the show ring led to extremes, to pudgy little Bulldogs that can hardly walk, and have to be delivered by caesarean section, collies with heads so long and narrow that eyesight is affected and where room for a functional brain hardly exists. Natural attributes of character, irrelevant or deleterious in the show ring, decline; and soft, compliant dogs, even in the breeds created and valued for the aggressive potential, are diluted for convenience in keeping a kennel full of breeding stock to produce pups for sale to pet homes.

The demands of ever more extreme, even grotesque, style took control of the process. In every breed more and more bitches were bred to fewer and fewer elite show ring winners, no one quite grasping that a closed gene pool can only become smaller and smaller, a process that in the natural order of things genetic sameness will in time punish. The concept of the closed gene pool, the essence of the purebred dog, is a novel genetic experiment less than two centuries old, a mere moment on the time scale of evolution. This experiment is failing.

Over the years, as the futility and pointlessness of it all became increasingly apparent, the motivation, the reason for these sand castles in the sky, remained elusive. Perhaps because this generation was the first to live in cities, away from the land, they grew out of touch. The children of the farmer, of the village and the smaller towns, grew up familiar with animals as the source of sustenance and a way of life, where horses and oxen were transportation and dogs had a real function on the farm and in the community. In this era most men needed to train horses and dogs, and deal with cattle, sheep or swine, to make a living and support a family. Such people would be practical about animals, and the concept of breeding their collie dogs with narrow heads and their bulldogs as grotesque monstrosities would have made no more sense than driving their sheep over a cliff. As city life emerged and the employed middle class came to have leisure and resources, the creation of canine monstrosities, strange as it may seem, came in some way to seem like a reasonable and fashionable hobby.

If there is a god, would he laugh, or would he cry?

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