

The Breed Today

The following article originally appeared in a Fred Philips booklet – “The Staffordshire Bull Terrier” in the early 1980’s and has been reprinted exclusively in TSK with kind permission by its author.

Most show fanciers these days simply won’t admit that the breed has changed quite a bit from the original types, and such an attitude isn’t hard to understand when one realizes the very people who are supposed to give them guidance encourage the breeding and perpetuation of the trendy, exaggerated type. Usually these are the people who condemn all the sporting activities of the breed yet still continue to strive for characteristics which they believe aid its combative ability. This is a slightly two-faced way of looking at things and though not agreeing with them, I go along with their views on dog-fighting, whether it be for money or enjoyment.

It’s a pastime, which has a brutalising effect on those taking part, and if any one has any romantic notions about it, these can be dispelled by looking at authentic photos of pit scenes or a dog, which has taken part in a hard battle.

Ours is an athletic breed possessing a somewhat pugnacious nature when roused and certainly enough courage to satisfy most people, and these attributes can be retained without using the dog-pit as an excuse to perpetuate them. Having said that, I still say the breed has changed, with perhaps one of the reasons being the indifference shown by knowledgeable fanciers of the past who have sat on the fence, or have gone along with the crowd and watched the breed being

taken over by those who have gradually changed it in to something which is only a product of their imaginations. Possibly another contributing factor could be the attention paid to those who plugged the all-rounder judge who is supposed to possess knowledge, which could be used to benefit the breed. We would all be grateful if someone would tell us what this knowledge is and what possible benefits the breed could obtain from persons having only a nodding acquaintance with it.

Over the years it’s true that some fanciers have expressed concern with the breeds divergence from the earlier types, being naturally worried about the effect on its athletic ability, and also remaining unconvinced that the changes made to the breed’s physique were an improvement.

Their words of wisdom were either ignored or made light of by others whose motives for doing so are questionable.

Troubles and problems arise in a breed when types which are already slightly exaggerated are made even more so, becoming in effect caricatures. When these are popularized they become accepted and glamorized as the “Ideal Type”.

The signs are already there that some strains could end up fashioned on the lines of the modern Bulldog, perhaps not so extreme, but definitely similar. For anyone to deny this shows the Ostrich like attitude adopted by many of the first prize oriented element in the breed at the present time.

What the breed needs today are fanciers who not only have the knowledge to see but the honesty to admit it’s happening in our breed, and also for them to have the will to do something about it before the damage done by breeding for undesirable features becomes irreversible. Fanciers of this caliber could have a beneficial effect on any breed if allowed to impart their knowledge in the show ring but they rarely get the chance to, as their opinions often conflict with those in influential positions who have the final say in the choosing of judges. When one holds definite opinions then it takes a lot of heart to admit one is wrong, but I feel there are fanciers around willing to do just that and who will introduce into their breeding programmes dogs possessing qualities which will take the breed away from its present trend of breeding for the over-developed, short legged heavyweight.

Will the rings of the future see line-ups of Staffords panting and gasping for breath because their conformations have been developed to such extremes that they can no longer function efficiently as an athlete? Or will we see proud owners exhibiting athletic specimens, rippling with well exercised muscle, bouncing – not plodding – on legs of good length and breathing through muzzles long enough for their owners not to be confused with the French Bulldog?

Only time will tell.

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