

SOUNDNESS IN THE CHOW CHOW

The *AKC Complete Dog Book* defines soundness as: "the state of mental and physical health when all faculties are complete and functioning normally, each in rightful relation to the other." Usually dog breeders think only in terms of movement when they speak of soundness but I would like to put on my veterinarian's hat and discuss soundness as it relates to organic health in the Chow. I will discuss two problems which are apt to occur in our breed and which the breeder should be aware of if he would produce healthy Chows.

Entropion

This is the name given to the condition in which the eyelids turn in toward the eyeball. One or both eyes may be involved, and either upper or lower lids or both, the lower being most common. The amount of entropion varies from a slight inturning of the outside corner of the eye when the eyelashes lightly touch the cornea, to the complete lid turning in and the eyelid pressing against the eyeball. Symptoms vary from a slight watering of the eyes to severe and irreparable corneal damage and loss of eyesight.

In most cases this is an inherited condition, although the moderate sized, deep-set, almond-shaped eye of the Chow makes it especially prone to secondary entropion, which occurs in response to inflammation of the eye and an accompanying squinting of the lids. Breeders sometimes contend that Chows will always have entropion if the correct scowl, eye shape and placement are present. They should know that entropion occurs in many breeds other than the Chow, such as the Irish Setter, Golden Retriever, Kerry Blue Terrier and even in mixed breeds. We should not accept or excuse entropion as a necessary evil

associated with a good Chow head; many splendid-headed Chows are free are entropion. It should be understood that not all wet eyes are due to entropion and the diagnosis should be made by a veterinarian. Notwithstanding, judges who see a turned in lid in the ring are correct in penalizing it as an unsoundness.

Elongated Soft Palate

The roof of the mouth is formed by bone covered by soft tissue. The front part of this roof has bony ridges (the hard palate) and is continued backward by soft tissue (the soft palate). You can explore this structure in your own mouth as it is the same in dogs and humans. In the short-nosed and broadheaded dogs the soft palate will necessarily be wider; unfortunately, it is often flabby and too long. The soft palate then interferes with the entrance of air into the windpipe (trachea).

Symptoms vary from snoring and a tendency to pant in circumstances which do not cause panting in a normal dog to severe cases in which the dog may "pass out" briefly due to a lack of oxygen. The afflicted dogs are poor anesthetic risks and an endotracheal tube must be placed during general anesthesia. These dogs are also more subject to heat stroke because of their difficulty in breathing. Prolonged soft palate may occur in the very young puppy causing difficulty in swallowing and refluxing of milk through the nostrils, although this symptom is more often associated with cleft palate.

The diagnosis of elongated soft palate is not always easy and the symptoms described may be due to various other conditions. A dog with breathing difficulties should have a thorough veterinary examination to eliminate other heart and lung abnormalities. The final diagnosis may necessitate examination under general

anesthesia and must be done by a competent veterinarian.

Surgical Procedures and Show Eligibility

In the above two conditions the cure is corrective surgery. *AKC Dog Show Rules and Regulations* prohibit the showing of dogs whose appearances have been altered by surgical means; such dogs will be disqualified. A 1968

commentary prepared by the AKC for the *Journal of the American Veterinary Association* clearly states that dogs having had entropion surgery may not compete in AKC shows and the general interpretation therein would suggest that dogs having had soft palate surgery would also be ineligible for competition. The reasoning of AKC is perfectly correct. Dog shows are held to select and give recognition to those dogs that most nearly conform to the ideal described in the breed standard and thereby encourage the breeding of better dogs. Surgery done to enhance the appearance or correct physical defects of a dog make it impossible for a judge to evaluate that dog in its natural state. Such a dog, therefore, must be ineligible to compete in AKC shows.

Many Chows that have had corrective surgery are being shown and winning in the ring today. Those owners who show such dogs knowingly are breaking AKC rules and taking unfair advantage of those who abide by the rules. The AKC places the responsibility for detecting illegal surgery on the judges. This is impossible with soft palate surgery and often impossible in skillfully done entropion surgery. Unintentionally, the AKC Rules have driven discussion of corrective surgery underground; no one dares admit his Chow has had such surgery. It is difficult for the conscientious breeder to discover if a prospective stud has had surgery or if the ancestors of a puppy he contemplates buying have needed corrective surgery.

From off the record discussions with other breeders, I believe that both these inherited problems have increased percentage-wise in the last fifteen years. I also believe many breeders want to get away from these problems. Certainly the strict interpretation by AKC of the no-surgery rule has not decreased these problems. Perhaps the breeding of sound dogs might be facilitated by a relaxation of this rule as regards surgery necessary for the health of the dog, accompanied by encouragement of frank discussion of these problems. Alternatively, AKC might be more serious about publicizing and enforcing the No-surgery rule and require that a veterinarian be present at shows to examine dogs suspected of having had corrective surgery. Should the veterinarian be unable to rule at the show a trial board could be held and radiographs required when indicated.

A breed which suffers from serious health problems will decline in popularity. The pet buyer does not want a dog which must have major surgical repairs to make it a satisfactory companion. Many breeders have been discouraged by hereditary problems in Chows and have gone to other breeds or given up breeding altogether. Entropion, elongated soft palate, unsound knees, and unsound hock joints are most often inherited problems. They are detrimental to the health and happiness of the Chow. The concerned breeder will try to eradicate these problems in his stock. The conscientious dog judge should recognize and penalize these unsoundnesses when seen in the show ring.

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