

BREED FUNCTION

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During the early 1900's the breed had obtained (on a somewhat consistent basis) a "type". The International Standard had been in existence for only a short while and the breed was being perpetuated by those who were responsible for adopting a standard. The standard was based on: Type and Quality. Those qualities were based on "breed function".

Europeans did not breed dogs to any significant extent during World War II. Nor were dog shows held during that time to any significant degree if at all. In fact, entire kennels were bombed out or dogs put to sleep (destroyed), because of lack of food. Few kennels survived the war. It was up to those who survived in Europe to pull the breed together again and continue after 1945. Europeans have now had a little less than 30 years using a very reduced stock, to continue the breed toward breed quality.

Americans have not had the same problem. In fact, during the war years, our economy boomed, breeding expanded, dog shows began to creep up in popularity. We have had almost 30 years more to achieve success in dogs than the Europeans. And, interestingly enough, we still import to bring our stock to finer perfection. Why?

Not for one moment do I criticize importing stock. What I do question is why Americans have not accomplished more breed perfection than Europeans who have had about 30 years less and far fewer dogs and bitches to select from in a breeding program.

The pure fact is that since the breed is not native to America (as most aren't) the purpose for which the breed was bred has been entirely neglected in planning for the future of the breed. For instance, one hears such comments as: "The breed is a moving breed, so why does it need the proper standard head." "The breed doesn't work any more, so why must they move," or, "the Saint Bernard doesn't move with his head." On and on until one realizes that there really isn't any purpose for breeding the Saint Bernard at all. With that sort of thinking, where the breed function is lost, breed type is lost. Perhaps, if we agreed with the rationalizers, we would strike the Saint Bernard from the purebred inventory.

In Europe, the Saint Bernard is bred toward his breed-function. One breeder does not dwell on movement. One breeder does not seek only to perfect head type. One breeder does not concentrate only on size and strength. They remember the important thing: great dogs are bred for their function, with ALL that implies. It is "getting it all together" that is hard. Getting it all together takes a bit of risk; a lot of cooperation among breeders, a letting go of fear, and adoption of devotion to the breed, as well as a courage to face the challenge; through knowledge to breed type.

The Saint Bernard standard is one of the most exciting standards to have been written; "massive, extraordinarily muscular, tall, very powerful, powerful, etc., etc." Certainly no dog living up to this standard could be the size and build of a Collie, a Boxer, a Doberman, a Siberian Husky or Alaskan Malamute.

No two people move alike, yet, most move satisfactorily and well. Even athletes do not move exactly alike, yet most "runners" are very swift, with heart, training, conditioning and will separating them in competition. In any breed, no two dogs really move alike. Just as do people, dogs move according to their individual skeletal, muscle, and tendon form. To try and force every dog of every breed to move a smooth double track in a tight, terrier gait will eventually bring all purebred dogs to have similar bodies.

Not only is proper head type ignored in too many cases, now we are trying to bring the Saint Bernard to move like a terrier and calling it "beautiful". I predict, if the trend toward canine similarities instead of breed standardization continues, before many new centuries roll by, all purebred dogs will resemble each other to such a degree in movement that their ability to perform breed function will have been totally destroyed - other than those who are supposed to move like terriers, that is.

The function of the Saint Bernard is to move with strength, power, endurance and drive. He has been used for many jobs because of his size and strength. Centuries ago, the first wave of Molasser came into the valleys of lower Europe (Italy, Switzerland and Austria) as shepherds. They were slighter of size than the Molasser brought over the Alps by the Romans. They were, if history is correct, light of color, many white. Markings were nonexistent to any reportable degree.

Later, during the historic events of conquest, the Molasser, used for Gladiator dogs, army guard dogs because of their immense size and power, were presented to the Monks. Eventually, through a more of less natural selection process of the "fittest survived and reproduced", a strain evolved which proved highly helpful to the monks during their survival deeds.

Many crosses were tried as the dogs became too inbred and the loss of size became serious; serious in that the dogs were becoming too small to perform their duties as rescue dogs during blizzards, high winds, powering through three feet and higher snow drifts. The Newfoundland was not the only cross tried. The smaller "valley Molasser" was used for size and coat. The long coat proved detrimental to the dog working in snow and long-haired dogs were discontinued as Alpine working dogs.