

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT OF WORTHY COMMENTS ON SAINTS

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The preceding article written by Rex Roberts is an interesting piece of material, however, I disagree with him in reference to our Saint Bernards. I do not believe and nowhere in 5 1/2 years of researching the history of the Saint Bernard can I find information telling us their primary function is pulling! With no disrespect to Mr. Roberts, I would like to print a portion of information I have to indicate why I don't believe his article to be true.

History tells us the Saint Bernard was used to rescue people, human beings, men, women and children. They do not even pull these people to safety back to the Hospice once they were found. They would locate lost or stricken victims for the Monks and in some cases lie beside the victim until help arrived to move them or guide them to shelter. An important message here is they would have to possess an EXCELLENT TEMPERAMENT, calm and intelligent! Not shy, wary or vicious.

History suggests that they and their ancestors may have been used for light pulling in other parts of the world but it was never the primary function of the Saint Bernard as a "breed function". History also tells us the Saint Bernard was a much smaller dog than we've seen in the 1900's. This could be the reason why they were never considered a draft animal in the beginning.

The Rottweiler is a good example as history tells us that 1900 years ago the Romans left their dogs in and around the town of Rottweil (Southern Germany) where the breed was kept alive. He was traditionally the Roman camp dog. In the middle ages butchers would leave the walled town to go on buying expeditions and since robbers were likely to be waiting they would tie their money belts around the necks of their Rottweilers, thus the threat of losing their money was nil. They were unmolested on the trip out. On the trip back, the dogs were used as drovers, for this reason, the dogs were often called "Metzgerhunds". The Rottweiler is a dog of great power, steady disposition and great self-reliance. The Standard (AKC) states for this dog, who also was used as a draft animal but NOT as its "primary" function, that the back is straight, strong and rather short. Croup short, broad, but not sloping. (Croup, unlike a Saint Bernards).

Today I could imagine any dog over 40 pounds being used for pulling carts, weights, etc. but this does not allow me to change the dogs primary function or to change the Standard of this dog so as to allow him to be a better equipped draft dog. If I choose a breed of dog today to function as a draft animal it should not influence breeders, exhibitors, or judges to look at a dog built like a Percheron, Belgian, Clydesdale or mule today, tomorrow, 100 or 200 years from now.

A popular scene years ago in the United States was a cart with children in it and a Saint Bernard harnessed to it for pictures. Itinerant photographers would go from town to town with his Saint, harness and cart to sell photos of people's children sitting in the cart. (Wonderful selling point!)

It is true a Saint Bernard enjoys working and pulling is work. If he is strong and powerful in every part he would naturally be able to pull heavy loads (10 time his own weight). But have you ever thought if he had the training as his ancestors did if he wouldn't enjoy his work as a rescue dog also? Imagine your Saint living high in the Alps, being of sound mind and body and looking the noble part as our Standard tells us, being READY, ABLE AND WILLING to rescue a lost or injured stranger! To me this is his "Primary Function".

Our Standard tells us the back is very broad, perfectly straight as far as the haunches, from there gently sloping to the rump and merging imperceptibly into the root of the tail (meaning the croup). Why then, didn't they print the Standard to say the haunches should be elevated as a draught animal? If he were to function as a horse or mule for pulling he would be more efficiently built! But because this IS NOT the function or intention of the Saint Bernard he is to be built or structured as the Standard states!!

So PLEASE keep your ideal Saint Bernard in keeping with the Standard! Let us continue to strive for a powerful, strong, beautiful Saint Bernard that is NOBLE, INTELLIGENT, GENTLE and IMPOSING animal that he should be, and if you want your Saint Bernard to pull as his function for your enjoyment as well as his, by all means do so, but remember he is a Saint Bernard and he should look and act like the marvelous breed of dog he is.