Letters

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**Letters**

**DOG OWNERSHIP**

**Improving the health and welfare of all dogs**

JUST before Christmas, the RSPCA launched its ‘Born to Suffer’ campaign. I have written to the RSPCA expressing the Kennel Club’s concern about the accuracy of its campaign, and our views may be of interest to colleagues.

The Kennel Club believes that those interested in canine health and welfare would be more effective if we worked for a common cause, but this campaign suggests that the RSPCA remains intent on working in isolation from the Kennel Club for the improvement of dogs’ lives. I am extremely depressed that this is the case.

We had understood the RSPCA campaign would focus on ‘people’s behaviour when thinking of buying a dog’. Why then does it choose to focus solely on pedigree dogs (ie, those registered with the Kennel Club), when this excludes some two-thirds of all the dogs in the UK? Referring to ‘purebred’ dogs would have at least taken into account the huge number of these bred by commercial puppy farmers, who do not register their dogs with the Kennel Club, and sell to the unsuspecting public purely on the basis of appearance. Even this would still exclude countless so-called ‘designer’ crossbreeds – and it is difficult to comprehend how the RSPCA campaign helps these dogs.

It is the Kennel Club’s view that by simply laying the blame at the door of the Kennel Club’s breed standards rather than looking at improving the way in which all dogs are bred and acquired in the UK, the RSPCA has missed a huge opportunity to educate the public on the correct way to buy a dog. Nowhere in this campaign does the RSPCA offer potential puppy owners any guidance on what they should be looking for, instead of merely choosing a dog for its looks. There is no mention, for example, of how to find a responsible breeder. There are more than 7500 members of the Kennel Club’s Assured Breeder Scheme who would deserve a mention. Nowhere do we see the RSPCA suggesting what to ask a breeder before purchase.

In place of practical advice, the RSPCA calls for more change to breed standards. The Kennel Club reviewed and revised all 210 of its breed standards in 2009 with the assistance of several leading members of the veterinary profession. This review was undertaken to ensure that none of the standards contained wording that could be misconstrued by breeders or judges as encouraging any type of physical exaggeration that may impact on a dog’s ability to walk, see or breathe easily. In addition, all of the breed standards contain the following wording in their introduction:

‘A Breed Standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed.’

It is difficult to be certain what information forms the basis of the views expressed in the campaign, as no reference is provided. However, there is a reference to a ‘recent study’ that is suggested to show that the 50 most popular breeds have some aspect of their body which can cause suffering. I believe this may be the Royal Veterinary College study published some time ago. If this is correct, the data are historical and were sourced from all around the world and cannot reliably be extrapolated to UK dogs. I fear the RSPCA may have misinterpreted this work to justify its negative stance.

This new RSPCA campaign would simply appear to be a negative exercise using the registered pedigree dog as a focus in an attempt to dissuade people from owning a dog. In our view none of this is in the best interest of dogs, whether registered with the Kennel Club or otherwise.

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