

Is it time for D.C.A. to discuss the possibility of AKC registration of the descendants of the Dalmatian-Pointer cross, also known as backcross?

What has been accomplished by 35 years of backcross breeding? The following excerpt is taken from the DCA LUA Study Group Website:

"..., whether LUA Descendants impact significantly on urinary uric acid related clinical syndromes compared to either their HUA littermates or to AKC registered Dalmatians remains to be proven. Despite the fact that all AKC registered Dalmatians are homozygous recessive for the fixed genetic defect, not all such Dalmatians produce urate crystals, stones or related clinical syndromes. The reasons for this may relate to improvements in animal husbandry (strict diet control and generous water intake), or may imply causative factors other than increased urinary uric acid. In addition, preservation of breed "type" – adjudicated by the approved AKC Dalmatian Standard – remains to be assessed..."

How much scientific methodology has been imposed upon the backcross breeding program? The short answer is little to none. Backcross dogs are the product of a breeding program. They are not the product of scientific research or even of a sanctioned project. Poor and incomplete records have been kept. The official DCA LUA website makes it very clear that this is NOT a research study, but rather a few peoples' breeding program. Neither, DCA nor DCAF nor the AKC has agreed to fund any sanctioned research into this breeding program.

Is Dalmatian stone syndrome a serious enough health issue in the breed to risk alteration of the approved AKC Dalmatian Standard by introducing another breed's genetics? There are no definitive studies to say for sure, but analysis of available data indicates that less than 3% of Dalmatians actually form stones of any type. Those that actually block and die represent an even smaller percentage. The incidence of Dalmatian stone syndrome is comparable to many other breed health issues – hypothyroidism, epilepsy and hip dysplasia. It is significantly less than other identified breed health issues – skin allergies and deafness. Certainly even a small percentage is too much for the owners of dogs that do develop stones, block and ultimately die, but it is a relatively small problem for the breed as a whole, and does not justify AKC registration of an unproven hybrid breed. The AKC registered Dalmatian is indeed already one of the healthiest breeds in existence.

Is the HUA gene solely responsible for Dalmatian stone syndrome? No. All researchers who have scientifically studied the unique Dalmatian characteristic of HUA agree that this is not the only cause of the syndrome. If that were the case, all worldwide Dalmatians would develop stones when in fact, only a small percentage do. The other causes are unknown and remain a mystery related to our ancient breed. Dr. Bartges, one of the leading stone experts, states in his comments about the backcross program that "*this is only ONE piece of the puzzle*".

Does LUA eliminate Dalmatian stone syndrome? That is unlikely and unknown because despite 35 years of breeding backcross dogs, complete records of the progeny have not been kept. However, LUA stands for Low Uric Acid, not No Uric Acid, and as noted above, HUA is not the only contributing factor to Dalmatian stone formation or related clinical syndromes. Additionally, Dalmatians form all types of stones – not just uric acid ones. For these reasons, it is unlikely that stone formation can be eliminated. However, frequent hydration, frequent exercise for bladder voiding, and low-purine diets are effective preventive measures.

What harm to the breed could come from allowing AKC registration of backcross dogs? The answer is that we don't know. No testing or studies have been done to prove that the low level of uric acid remains constant throughout these dogs lives, to determine if they ever develop stones, or to determine what health issues they may encounter. Despite 35 years of breeding these dogs, there have been relatively few litters at all and only two recorded LUA to

LUA breedings. The progeny of those have also not been tracked carefully. LUA to LUA breedings would be required to increase the number of LUA pups per litter. All breeders know that line breeding doubles up both the good and the bad traits. Further alterations to the breed standard, particularly in size, spotting, type, and the introduction of potential new health problems such as an increased incidence of cancer are all potential outcomes of pure LUA to LUA breedings.

Of concern in particular to many breeders, AKC breeder judges and Dalmatian enthusiasts are alterations to Dalmatian type and spotting. While some who have seen the dogs feel the spots are acceptable, many do not believe they conform to our standard. Small spots and frosting have been observed to be consistent in LUA dogs. It seems apparent that after 12 generations, this is as good as it gets since one will always have to breed to an LUA, which to date only have small and frosty spots, to produce LUA get. It is very unlikely that the spotting will improve over time. We do not know that the transporter gene responsible for HUA does not contribute to important characteristics such as spotting, but the evidence of 12 generations of these backcross dogs would suggest that it does. Spotting, while cosmetic, is one of the key traits that makes Dalmatians uniquely Dalmatians. The DCA has accepted that spotting is related to the high incidence of deafness in Dalmatians and has recognized that as a worthwhile risk to preserve the uniqueness of the breed. We should adopt the same position related to HUA. It is a truly unique characteristic of Dalmatians, which could be related to spotting, could be related to type, could be related to extremely low rates of cancer in the breed, or could be related to any number of unique Dalmatian traits.

What harm to DCA Members could come from allowing AKC registration of the backcross dogs? Virtually all of the backcross dogs are owned or co-owned by a small handful of members. A visit to the Heritage Project website will reveal the marketing being done by those members who control these dogs. Backcross dogs are promoted as "*healthier*" and "*normal*". The uninformed general public will not understand that AKC registered Dalmatians ARE normal and that only a very small percent of Dalmatians actually form stones.

Ours is one of the most ancient purebred dogs. From the AKC, "*We do know that it is a very old breed, having come through many centuries virtually unchanged.*" Genetic alteration should be considered an extreme solution to an extreme problem. Our breed is not on the verge of extinction. Dalmatians have been uniquely Dalmatians for centuries and continue to be one of the healthiest breeds in existence. Why would we make this drastic change that could impact our breed in ways we don't begin to understand, based on non-scientific information? The lack of scientific methodology is reason enough to say "NO" at this time.

Join your fellow members and vote NO to DCA discussion of AKC Registration of the descendants of the Dalmatian-Pointer cross.

Cheryl Bartell	Ginger & Mark Iwaoka	Charlie & Jacki McGovern	Dr. Marty Ross, DVM
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Judy Box	Carrie Jordan	Donna Mitchell	Carol Schubert
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