**What is ethical breeding and why is it important.**

**By Errol Tooth - Gesundheit Kennels**

As an "old time" breeder in NZ of French bulldogs I am often asked why I began breeding these little characters, well the reason can be found in those last two words "little characters". Before breeding frenchies I bred Rottweilers (and continue to this day) and whilst lovely dogs, when introduced to frenchies by my Aunt the playful, loyal and clown like character of this breed meant it was always going to be when rather than if. When I did decide to take up the mantle of frenchie breeder I wanted to make sure I bred the best possible dog which brings me to the topic of this article, ethical breeding and its importance.

Breeding the best possible dog to me essentially means breeding a healthy dog to the NZKC breed standard, the underpinnings of which is breeding ethically. If you go onto the internet you will find many articles defining this term but they all share some common traits. From my viewpoint I believe ethical breeding with Frenchies involves the following:

**1) Not selling puppies through pet stores**

Why is this a problem? Because as a breeder you have no idea where they will end up and you have no control over the "adoption" process. Remember not all puppies end up getting bought at a pet shop then what? Even if they all get bought they may not end up going to a good home. If you care enough about your puppies you have to try and ensure they go to a good home and this cannot be done by selling through a pet store. Dogs are not a commodity and should not be treated like an item in a supermarket. As a responsible and therefore ethical breeder you need to ensure your pups go to good homes. This doesn't necessarily mean a well to do owner but an owner who can care for the pup emotionally and medically. Selling through a pet store does not ensure this.

**2) Developing an extensive knowledge of the breed and going to dog shows**

By developing an extensive knowledge of the breed you understand their weakness, strength, temperament, what is correct conformation and traits. This allows you to deal with issues that might develop with your dogs properly, know when to get your dogs treatment and also understand simple things like how much exercise your dogs need etc. Importantly though you can advise future owners whether the breed is suitable for them, how to treat their dog from a socialization viewpoint to dealing with small medical issues.

Why go to dog shows? For your dog to be titled “Champion”, the sausage sizzle and dress up of course! Seriously though whilst this is fun an ethical breeder goes to dog shows to learn and understand. Learn what makes a healthy frenchie both from a physical and mental viewpoint and understand current trends with the breed. You also get to know your dogs better when competing and the likely temperament of the offspring they will produce. Just like a doctor goes to medical school to learn how to be a doctor, an ethical breeder goes to dog shows to learn how to be a good breeder. For example you might learn from the visiting International judge that in their country they are breeding out a certain trait because of health issues that are starting to arise there. Further you also get the chance to talk to other local breeders and see how their dogs are developing and how you can improve your dogs. Lastly a breeder who goes to dog shows means that each of their breedings will be meticulously planned, the pups will be subject to the appropriate medical attention and are likely to be well socialized for the ring. Remember not all of the pups bred by an ethical breeder will meet the show standard but for a potential new owner it will mean they get a great dog. Think about it.

**3) Breed only dogs 2 years or older and breed the dog only a limited number of times**

With the popularity of frenchies in NZ and in particular Auckland demand would appear to be greater than supply and whilst it might be tempting to try meet this demand, an ethical breeder will only breed when their bitches are ready and from an age view point this means no earlier than 2 years old. The reason for this is that the bitch is just not physically and mentally mature. Without going into the science, the best example I can make is to ask a question: Would you think it OK to allow a female human to have children as soon as she experienced her first menstrual cycle? Imagine the complications and danger! Well the same is with breeding frenchies (or any dog for that matter) any earlier than 2 years old.

**4) Not spreading yourself too thin**

As the saying goes "jack of all trades, master of none". Breeding dogs is complicated and none more so than frenchies. From conception right up to the final adoption of your dogs an ethical breeder needs to be focused. How can a breeder be focused on ensuring the best possible frenchie if they are breeding pugs, pugs X frenchies, bulldogs X frenchies, chihuahuas etc.

**5) Does not engage in the breeding of so called "rare" or "exotic" colours i.e blue, black and tan, merle (grey moth patterning), chocolate.**

I am now getting asked in NZ whether I will be breeding blue frenchies to which I categorically state "NO". As stated earlier ethical breeding means that you do what is best for the breed. Breeding these colours is not doing what is best for frenchies. There is a reason why no kennel club globally recognizes these colours. The colours ARE FAULTS and in the past had been specifically bred out of the breed. Now with some clever marketing via instagram and facebook they are being sold as "rare", "exotic", "hard to find" etc. Don't be fooled it is simply "an emperors new clothes" marketing tactic.

If we take the colour merle, this is the result of breeding a frenchie with a chihuahua as the gene for merle is not a naturally occurring colour in frenchies. So what has been the result of this? If you go on facebook or instagram and look at the breeders who are engaged in this particular breeding you will see beautiful pictures of merle coloured frenchies however if you dig deeper you will find this breeding has resulted in micropthalmia (small or deformed eyes), anopthalmia (missing eye or eyes) etc. What about blue coloured frenchies (which I have seen recently advertised in NZ)? Well a common problem with this particular colour is dilution alopecia. Its results in the frenchie experiencing hair loss and severe skin inflammation (anyone with severe eczema can explain how bad things can get in winter or summer). So as an ethical breeder you do not engage in or condone such breeding. Nuff said!

**6) Do not treat breeding as a business**

I understand that after reading the above you might have a wee chuckle and possibly be going "yeah right" (sound like a Tui ad?). Well I can tell you ethical breeders breed for the love of their dogs. The reason treating breeding as a business is far from ideal is because it puts pressure on the breeder. Pressure to churn out as many pups as possible (see point 3 above), breed frenchies that are not in accordance with the NZKC breed standard to maximize profit (see point 5 above), sell to anyone who has cash rather than be selective (see point 1 above) and ultimately just take any shortcuts necessary to make those sales.

Whilst I could write more I have highlighted the most salient points that I feel underpin an ethical breeder. If you are reading this as a potential owner of a frenchie I would advise you to do your homework on the breeder (that includes me!), think about the above, be patient and ask all the questions you need to be comfortable. Owning a frenchie in my opinion is one of life's great pleasures and as a potential owner you also need to play your part in ensuring that you keep all breeders honest.

Having a frenchie is a privilege but breeding them more so.

**Errol**

**Gesundheit Kennel**

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