



## This Breeder's Philosophy

We Boxer breeders are an odd group; we carefully select our breedings to produce healthy, well-balanced puppies and then we subject them to surgical insults, docking their tails, removing their dew claws & cropping their ears, during their most formative months.

Having said that, I confess to preferring their appearance, when these things have been done. I know that it's illogical and, that, ethically, we should reach our ends by selective breeding, rather than by surgery. Yes, I do conform to current practice, but, I wish that it were unnecessary, to have a chance in Breed competition.

As I said, I aim to produce healthy puppies; I also want them to be typey and beautiful and to share in improving the Breed. Sometimes, I cannot but wonder if those two aims are not mutually exclusive.

We sadly know that, from the Breed's earliest days, in the search for our ideal Boxer, we have doubled up on harmful genes while we doubled up (by line and in-breeding) on the desirable ones. For years we've been faced with these facts and we've tried mightily to follow breeding patterns that would eliminate the hereditary diseases, and characteristics, that came about.

Some of us became convinced that we should eradicate, from the Boxer gene pool, all dogs who manifest the smallest trace of these defects: some go further and would include all relatives of these animals. In the last few years we've learned that the Boxer gene pool is small and then arise the questions, "What will be left? Will they be Boxers?".if we follow this route.

*Testing* has become a mantra to some Boxer people; they believe that multiple tests, and greater frequency in applying them, will help us to combat these hereditary diseases. These same folk are uninhibited in speaking ill of those who disagree with their stance. They also take it foul scorn if any of us cavil about the escalating costs. Naturally, if you're associated with a university study, or receive some other kind of subsidy, such *testing* has less impact upon your finances.

I think that indiscriminate *testing* can be counter-productive and use this approach ... should a problem arise, I will employ studies to, if possible, determine its cause and, after appropriate ones, will take the best indicated action.

Currently, and for some years, there are those who advocate frequent Holter monitoring of our Boxers; their manifest aim is to eliminate the cardio-myopathies that afflict our Breed. They

even require that the results be read by Board certified veterinary cardiologists, which seems reasonable, unless you know that the results are interpreted by computer programs , after all who could read a 24 hour tape?



Puppy at 14 weeks.

To my mind, it's a case of taking, and applying, inconclusive studies. Dr Meurs, who has been conducting the American Boxer Club Charitable Foundation's research on the disease, is not, at this stage, able to tell us the meaning of any given number of ventricular premature systoles per 24 hours. Further, the number of VPC's may vary greatly from one day to another; referring to asymptomatic dogs. It is even truer in symptomatic ones.

It now seems that we're dealing with more than one cardiomyopathy ... one is of early onset and another is of late onset. How can we possibly defend against a late onset disease? By frequent Holter monitoring? I think not, since the predictive power, which we so urgently need, isn't there.

To use another example from the same disease. It has been found that the get of two Boxers ,who have no VPCs, may still demonstrate them. A truly horrid situation.

We also know that cardio-myopathies, both of known and unknown ætiology, are becoming more common in humans. Is this also true in dogs? Of course we know that cardio-myopathy (inflammation of the heart muscle) has many other causes than hereditary ones ... such as viral (?Parvovirus) and bacterial infections. There has been an effort to rename the disease dilated cardio-myopathy, but, to me, that is referring to the end stages of the disease(s), when the cardiac muscle packs up, the ventricles can no longer push out the blood, become flaccid and dilate.

It may be appropriate to Holter our Boxers once, to establish base lines and further studies, but, I do not see the benefits, in asymptomatic dogs.

I remember when, with my first Boxer, I spoke, with alarm, to my veterinarian after I found her irregular heart beat. He blithely told me that most dogs had such arrhythmias and that I should not worry. At the time, we were treating her for demodectic mange with methylene blue! I did eventually cure the mange by scrubbing her whole body, daily, with Sulfodene; either that or her own body defenses matured and healed her. We didn't treat her heart and she lived to be almost twelve, having two litters. At age 3 she had histiocytomas which were widely excised

and did not recur. She died from metastatic mammary adeno-carcinoma. Now, I suppose, we'd be exhorted to get twice yearly Holters.

I've been told, on several occasions, by the veterinary staff at Texas A & M University, that most Boxers which they encounter have cardiac murmurs. In fact, they say that is rare to have one without them. I've had one who, upon further study, was diagnosed with aortic stenosis of mild degree who had an ventricular ejection fraction of 1.7. Currently, Dr Meur's study indicates that this may not even be the disease of Boxers, as once was thought. It may only be That Boxers have, normally, sizeable aortas. No easy answers, are there? I don't plan to keep repeating the colour doppler studies ... what utility would there be? The dog is 4½, enjoys rude health, exercises vigorously daily even in our Texas heat, never has collapsed, and does His studly duties ably.

Following this, I no longer take my puppies to A & M for assessment of murmurs that we find. It's expensive and tells me nothing

What I do do is to give a health warranty, when I sell a Boxer. It states that I believe the dog to be healthy and guarantee this, provided that he be examined, by a licensed veterinarian within 3 working days. If a problem is found, **at the buyer's choice**, I will take the Boxer back and refund their purchase price, pay reasonable veterinary fees or replace the dog (if I'm able). I advise them that food should not be changed rapidly, that parasite control is needed and that incompletely immunised puppies should not be exposed to neighbour's dogs. At the same time, I give them a health record asking that they show it, and their purchase agreement, to their vet. I also ask them to advise me of any problems and offer my help.

That seems fair to me. None of us can promise Boxers who are free of any problems, hereditary or otherwise. We can, and should, use our best efforts to screen our dams and our sires from these hereditary diseases, but, that does not mean that we must employ every available test, nor should we be expected to spend ourselves into the poorhouse in that pursuit

At the same time, if I see signs of a developing problem, I will make all, reasonable tries to diagnose and eliminate it.

Currently, most of my Boxers seem to live out their normal life span, which I find to be about eleven ... their greatest killers has been different forms of cancer.

My Boxers have been some my greatest joys and sorrows.

Audrey G Schnell

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Ch Pax' Tarquin CD @ 9 yrs.