



The Trouble with Tibetan Mastidoodles

Last summer, a friend sent me ads and pictures from a breeder who was enthusiastically advertising Tibetan Mastidoodles for sale. As summer turned to fall, he continued to keep me updated. Within a couple of months, the breeder was advertising on craigslist and offering the pups for free out of the back of her SUV at a local parking lot. Tibetan Mastiffs are great dogs. Poodles are great dogs. So what is the problem with Tibetan Mastidoodles?

Most breeders who purposefully cross-breed have good intentions. They have bought into the myth that mixed breeds are healthier than purebreds and they believe that the resulting pups will embody the best of both worlds. Unfortunately, the end result may be that the pups instead get the worst of both, carrying genetic diseases from both breeds. A study out of UC Davis (Bellumori, 2013) looking at 24 inheritable diseases in over 90,000 dogs found there was no higher incidence in purebred vs. mixed breed dogs for the majority of these health concerns. Purebreds did display a higher incidence of 10 inheritable conditions, but the incidence was greater in newly developed breeds or those from the same or similar lineage, indicating that selective breeding practices can be used to reduce or prevent prevalence of disease in the purebred from known lines.

The temperament of Tibetan Mastidoodles or similar mixes is even more concerning than potential health issues. Although we recognize different breeds by their appearance, most breeds were not developed for appearance but to perform a particular job, and their temperaments reflect this. The instincts, drive, and physical ability to perform specific tasks are defining characteristics of a breed. For example, Border Collies, Corgis, and Australian Cattle Dogs are high energy, and instinctively circle, nip, and herd, while Pointers, Retrievers, and Spaniels are bred to hunt: They are naturally alert, energetic, and have serious stamina. These traits are in their genes. Poodles have historically been bred to hunt and retrieve water fowl, and therefore embody intense concentration, easy trainability, high energy levels (sometimes to the point of “nervous energy”), and high prey drive. TMs are bred as property and family guardians and are aloof, independent, territorial, and although they are capable of short bursts of energy, more sedentary than a hunting dog. TMs and Poodles are very different by nature: Two distinct dog breeds developed by selecting specific traits for multiple generations. Because of this, we can predict with a great deal of certainty what the next generation will produce. This predictability is an asset and a tool to be used when owners select the appropriate dog for their needs and lifestyle, but it is missing with mixed breeds.

An article in Psychology Today (Coren, 2013) reported on a study by researchers at UC Berkeley that demonstrated how genetic temperament traits are passed on when two dissimilar breeds are cross-bred. The study was based on cross breeding Newfoundlands, which tend to be easy going and affectionate, protective of people, loyal, submissive, and not easily startled by noises, with Border Collies, which tend to be dominant, intense, focused, yet easily startled, and are more devoted to their jobs than their people. In the first generation, puppies exhibited personality traits that could be described as a blend of the two; more laid back and affectionate than BCs but more focused and easily excitable than Newfs. However, in the F2 generation, temperaments emerged in unpredictable patterns. Puppies demonstrated distinct breed characteristics from both breeds in the same dog in just about every combination possible. More concerning was the fact that there was no way to predict which characteristics showed up in which pups: A pup that resembled a Newfie in appearance could embody the personality of a Border Collie: A large, hyperactive dog with a heightened startle reflex. Going back to the issue of the Tibetan Mastidoodle, can you imagine a high energy 150 lb guard dog that is

overly anxious or reactive? As demonstrated by the UC Berkeley project, first generation may not yield a problem, but looking down the road to future generations, random combinations of breed characteristics could be a potential nightmare.

From the studies cited, there appears to be no advantage to cross-breeding. So what's the answer to the Tibetan Mastidoodle dilemma? Before jumping on the designer dog train, take the long view with the future of the breed in mind, because the future of the breed is what is at stake. Support preservationist breeders. Those people who are working diligently to preserve, protect, and promote the breed as we know it. Support the American Kennel Club, the American Tibetan Mastiff Association, National Purebred Dog Day, and legislation that assists breeders of purebred dogs to do their job. Avoid breeding for the market place. Strive to perpetuate what the Tibetan people cherished in their dogs. Guard the purity of the Tibetan Mastiff with the same fervor that the Tibetan Mastiff would guard you.

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- (1) Coren, Stanley. Does Genetics Determine a Dog's Personality? Psychology Today. April 17, 2013.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/canine-corner/201304/does-genetics-determine-dogs-personality>
- (2) Bellumori et al. Prevalence of inherited disorders among mixed-breed and purebred dogs: 27,254 cases (1995–2010), J. Am Vet Med Assoc 2013;242:1549-1555.
<http://mercola.fileburst.com/PDF/HealthyPets/InheritedDisordersOfDogs.pdf>

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