

Norwich Terriers, 8-15

Title: Choosing a Brood Bitch: A Bit of a Gamble

I'm not a fan of country music, but as I begin writing this column, from the radio in the next room "The Gambler" is crooning, "*the secret to survivin' is knowing what to throw away, and knowing what to keep.*" Choosing a brood bitch is a bit of a gamble. Whether acquiring your first foundation stock or selecting the pick bitch puppy from your own litter, knowing what to keep is key to success. For breeders of Norwich Terriers—a breed with an average litter size of three to four puppies—this is easier said than done. Often, we must arrive at a conclusion from a small number of puppies.

As a breeder, my first priority is the brood bitch. I believe that no kennel or line is stronger than its bitches. The foundation bitch is often the cornerstone of a successful line. Yet few people actually choose a Norwich Terrier brood bitch. Most will buy a "show quality" puppy, perhaps show and finish her, and then breed a litter hoping to get a female puppy to breed on. That "foundation" bitch becomes a permanent part of the new breeder's line. The die is cast.

Too narrow a focus on finding a "show quality" bitch may bring disappointing results. While it is true that the great show dog (or bitch) is often valuable for the breeder, many great show dogs will fail to reproduce their own excellent qualities. On the other hand, the dog or bitch who is hard pressed to even win a ribbon may prove invaluable as breeding stock. So, how should we choose a brood bitch? The bitch herself (whether adult or puppy) must be evaluated, to include her health, temperament, and conformation. Certainly, we only want to keep the brood bitch who was a good mother and, we hope, an easy whelper too. Remembering that the goal is to select a bitch who will produce progeny retaining the ideals of a Norwich Terrier, her ability to produce is most important. If acquiring a new adult bitch (or if deciding whether to keep a bitch in our breeding program), we may be able to evaluate the progeny she has already produced. If she consistently produced high quality puppies, that is a promising sign of what she is likely to produce again. The key word is "consistently". A single star (usually the one we are most likely to see in the show ring!) in a litter of rather ordinary puppies is not a good sign. In assessing the bitch's progeny, we would like to determine how the sire may have contributed to their excellence or mediocrity. Even an outstanding brood bitch will fail with the wrong mate.

Because Norwich bitches produce a small number of puppies, evaluating her based on her progeny is difficult. If the bitch is young, her progeny will be few (or none). In this case, we will need to predict her ability to produce by her appearance and her pedigree. She should come from a good whelping line. In any pedigree, I place the most importance on the dam. This is because there are many dogs produced by an exceptional sire to each one from an outstanding dam. I suspect this is true because an exceptional stud dog will be bred to many bitches, of which only a few are of exceptional quality. Scrutiny of the pedigree may bring to light names of Norwich whose qualities we would prefer not to reproduce. Of course there is not a perfect pedigree, but if the dam has produced quality Norwich and is herself of first rate ancestry we can lessen the uncertainty. The letters "CH" before names in a pedigree mean very little to me because as mentioned earlier, show worth and breeding worth are not the same metric. The show champion

Norwich bitch who needs artificial progesterone supplementation and a c-section, and then produces a singleton puppy, is not brood bitch quality.

We must evaluate the individual bitch under consideration in her appearance and structure. If she has serious faults in several aspects of the ideal Norwich, it is certainly a more risky gamble to breed from her. I like to see correct proportions and angulation, good skeletal structure and bone, and breed type. We know some faults are hard to eradicate. A Norwich Terrier bitch may be lacking in one particular trait (too big or too small, too light in bone, soft coat, have a long loin) but with intelligent selection of a mate, she is not as likely to pass her undesirable trait to her puppies.

As breeders, we must work with what we have available to us. Great bitches are few and not easy to obtain —obtaining a daughter may be easier. Choose only the best bitch to purchase or to breed from, considering her individual merit and her pedigree. To make it all work requires that we adhere to some simple rules of thumb and be ruthless in our final decisions. I spayed and placed several young bitches earlier this year rather than breed them to “see what I’d get”. Each possessed some desirable qualities, but magical thinking is no better than a gamble. “*Know when to walk away, know when to run ...*”

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