

THE HEALTH OF COCKER SPANIELS

COCKER SPANIELS ARE GENERALLY FIT AND HEALTHY DOGS AND THEY OFTEN LIVE INTO THEIR TEENS. HOWEVER THERE ARE A FEW HEREDITARY DISEASES CAUSED BY FAULTY GENES WHICH THE RAPID ADVANCE IN GENETIC TESTING ARE HELPING TO ERADICATE. PUPPY BUYERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF THESE AND THE KENNEL CLUB/BRITISH VETERINARY ASSOCIATION TESTING SCHEMES.



Are my genes as beautiful me? It's important to find out before I have puppies.

Photography Shel Cowles and Barbara Ward



All puppies are cute but will their DNA ensure a long and happy life? Only one way to be sure – health test the parents!



We are 6 months old! We wouldn't be here, happy and mischievous, if our parents had carried the FN gene!

FAMILIAL NEPHROPATHY (FN)

This is a fatal kidney disease in young cockers, it was soon realised that it was a hereditary condition and the breed sought to find out which breeding animals carried the faulty gene. These were not bred from again. Affected animals did not live long enough to breed so the condition was well on the way to being eradicated before a DNA test was introduced. The FN gene is recessive which means progeny need a faulty gene from each parent to develop the condition. Antigene developed the test and the Kennel Club co-ordinate results which appear on pedigrees.

EYE CONDITIONS

PROGRESSIVE RETINAL ATROPHY (PRA)

This is a condition seen in a number of breeds of dog. The most common form in our breed is GPRA (General PRA or prcd-PRA). The age of onset can be from 18 months to 7 years and is gradual, starting with night blindness and progressing to total blindness. It is caused by a recessive gene and progeny with a faulty gene from each parent develop the disease. Careful monitoring of the condition within the breed was undertaken, but the age of onset meant affected dogs could have been bred from. Progress in identifying the gene meant Optigen were able to develop a DNA test from a blood sample. Regular eye tests are still recommended for breeding stock as there are other similar diseases. The Kennel Club and BVA collect results and they appear on pedigrees.



These cockers will always be able to see their tennis balls as they will never develop PRA.



GLAUCOMA

Like humans, dogs can develop a build up of pressure in the eye which can lead to blindness. The current test available is gonioscopy which just shows if there is a predisposition to the condition. The mode of inheritance is not clear at the moment so there is no genetic test



OTHER CONDITIONS AND ONGOING RESEARCH

HIP DYSPLASIA

This is abnormal development of the hip joint. It is more commonly seen in larger dogs. Cocker Spaniels can be x-rayed under the KC/BVA scheme and results appear on pedigrees.



CHRONIC PANCREATITIS, MAMMARY TUMOURS, ACRAL MUTILATION (a disease where the dog has little feeling in the extremities leading to self mutilation of feet etc.) are all being studied with a view to developing DNA tests to eradicate them completely, in fact Antigene has just introduced a test for the latter. The future is bright for our breed if we have careful breeders and discerning puppy buyers.

Cocker Spaniels are a lovely breed, fantastic family pets and most live to a ripe old age with few problems, even in later years.