

The 20 Basic Breeding Principles by Robert Oppenheimer are famous and widely practiced by many great dog breeders. Mr. Oppenheimer was a very successful breeder of Bull Terriers.

Here are comments from some of our Schipperke breeders about those breeding principles.

Bette Wynn

Breeder's Education Chairperson

## **20 Basic Breeding Principles**

by Robert Oppenheimer

**1. Don't make use of indiscriminate outcrosses. A judicious outcross can be of great value; an injudicious one can produce an aggregation of every imaginable fault of the breed.**

**Mary Deats, Aradat, UK (MD):** I totally agree, and it is the use of 'judicious' where some breeders fall down. Incorporating a new bloodline into ones kennel will often take several generations of breeding it back into ones own lines before the true impact, positive or negative can be seen.

**Marion Postgate, Cantymere, Canada (MP):** Outcrosses must be made only to achieve a goal for the long term – to acquire some characteristic missing in a line. My own experience has often been disappointment, even when I thought I was being careful in my choice. Like most of us today, I never had a large breeding pool, which is needed to utilize the results of an outcross best, breeding it judiciously into an established line. I think this is a problem for most of us in less popular breeds today. We do not have either a large gene pool, or many dogs available to us. The lack of numbers limits us severely.

It has been a fad recently for some veterinarians to advise breeders to employ only outcrosses, to minimize the chance of disease in purebred dogs. If only good breeding were that simple! Even outcrosses of different breeds can carry the same genetic defects and pass them on to their unfortunate mixed-bred progeny.

**Marcia Bailey, Dream On, Iowa (MB):** "Every imaginable fault" might be stretching it a bit; the individuals can only produce what they genetically possess. Know what you are breeding for, what characteristics you are trying to improve, before making the breeding. Then breed to the individual who produces those qualities.

**Shirley Smith, Logaven, New York (SS):** We all need to outcross at times but we have tried to be extremely careful to know our dogs and the ones we want to breed to so as not to double up on faults.

**Betty Wynn, Shalako, Alabama (BW):** I agree whole heartedly! The only time to do an outcross is when you can no longer correct the faults within the line. I have found with each outcross I have done, it has taken 3-5 generations to breed out the "faults" that came with it...while maintaining the "virtues" I went after. The secret to a successful outcross is to KEEP the dog that has the "virtue" you went out to get...and rarely does it look like what you are used to seeing.

**Janet Holland, Schojan, UK (JH):** We have used very few outcrosses in our breeding programme mainly because we felt we would be losing more than we gained with breed type. However we have often bought in a puppy from a mating to one of our boys which has given us a partial outcross to breed back in. This has worked well for us. Total out crossing often takes 2 or 3 generations to prove their total worth.

## **2. Don't line breed just for the sake of line breeding. Line breeding with complimentary types can bring great rewards; with unsuitable one, it will lead to immediate disaster.**

**MD:** How often I have heard breeders in many breeds boast about 'line breeding' to so and so's top kennels lines, yet at the same time they have not considered the phenotype they are using. All lines have their successes and their failures. Merely breeding by paper (genotype) can result in loss of type as well as quality. When a litter is produced in which every puppy is different, then I would view that as a failure. Far better to assess your dog/bitch and try to find a complimentary phenotype from lines that may not necessarily be tightly aligned with ones own. The gene pool for many breeds, including the Schipperke, is very small. Go back enough generations and you will find many animals in common.

**MP:** It takes experience to learn which lines can compliment one another. Breeders don't want to continue line breeding for too many generations, as a rule, or their stock becomes inbred, does not advance in quality, and often loses vigor.

**MB:** Again, I challenge the "immediate" part of this statement, though this type of breeding can very likely start a fast downward spiral.

**SS:** The key to line breeding is to use complimentary types. We have to be just as careful line breeding as with out crossing.

**BW:** You must be line breeding on an outstanding dog or bitch...otherwise, you cannot count on what the pedigree will produce.

**JH:** You have to have decent stock to line breed to in the first place or there is no point. We were lucky with our foundation animals.

## **3. Don't take advice from people who have always been unsuccessful breeders. If their opinions were worth having, they would have proved it by their successes.**

**MD:** How true how true, and yet they continue to tell others how to do it THEIR way. I would also qualify this statement to include people who bring out in each succeeding litter examples of whatever the breed, in which they all look different from the preceding ones. Yet, according to the 'expert', they are the best they have bred. Lack of continuity, lack of evenness of type, lack of discernible direction in establishing breed type are all red flags for me, and even more so, if the individual is a breeder judge of that breed.

**MP:** Look at the dogs a breeder produces over several generations, not just what they say.

**MB:** Very correct!

**SS:** A lot of people will offer advice, but I usually look at what someone is producing before I listen.

**BW:** And these are always the people with the most excuses...as to why they haven't produced a \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) winner. Those who make excuses will never be great breeders.

**JH:** Unfortunately the unsuccessful breeders are often the ones with the most advice to give!! Again we have been lucky with the 'mentors' we have had in the breed from the very beginning. Rosy Archer (Radash), Eileen Vincent (Tarnhows), Mary Deats (Aradet) and Don Nielsen (Midwatch) have all been generous with their advice and experience and also honest with their opinions. I only hope we have been as generous with new people coming into the breed. I do feel that success should not be measured by wins in the show ring alone but by the ability to breed a consistent, recognizable line of Schips.

**4. Don't believe the popular cliché about the brother or sister of the great champion being just as good to breed from. For every one that is, hundreds are not. It all depends on the animal concerned.**

**MD:** Yes, I agree, although the spread of genetics will make the sibling in the same ballpark as the champion, there may be reasons it is not shown, and must be assessed accordingly. Sometimes it may be a breed or constructional fault that prevents the animal from being shown/campaigned, sometimes owner's difficulty in getting to shows; the dog may not enjoy showing; all factors that must be considered on a case-by-case basis. I would have to say, however, that some of my best bitches for breeding have been the ones I don't show, and the show bitches the most difficult to get into whelp and produce accordingly.

**MP:** If a whole litter is outstanding – a very rare event – you may want to choose which one to breed to. But you should want to choose that dog on its own merits.

**MB:** Exactly. Frequently it is the great champion's sire who would make the best choice. And frequently that "great champion" can't reproduce himself.

**SS:** It does depend on the dog and what we are looking for in mating the two.

**BW:** Agree! It is always about the individual dog. While they come from the same parents, it doesn't mean they have the same genes.

**JH:** Many siblings of great champions have been as good if not better than the champion but, for whatever reason, may not have been campaigned or achieved the same kudos. Each dog should be judged on its own merits whether champion or not. Many great champions have been poor producers. Find the best possible mate for your animal, champion or not.

**5. Don't credit your dogs with virtues they don't possess. Self-deceit is a stepping-stone to failure.**

**MD:** If only more breeders would take off their rose tinted glasses! Ruthless criticism of ones own stock, to oneself, I hasten to add, is the only way forward. Kennel blindness is one of the biggest factors holding back many dog fanciers.

**MP:** Even the greatest dogs are not perfect. Analyze what is there. Be careful. It is easy to ignore bits we don't like! Or make excuses.

**MB:** This is known as "kennel blindness", not a good quality for breeders!

**SS:** We have tried to be very critical of our dogs and to be honest with ourselves and others about them. Who are we trying to fool?

**BW:** And most breeders have "self-deceit". Kennel blindness is the kiss of death.

**JH:** I do try to be brutally honest about my own dogs and hope I haven't been blinded by self deceit. I have dogs at home that have never been shown although I see poorer specimens in the show ring. If they are not right for me I don't show them. For instance I feel strongly that far too many over size Schips are in the show ring over here and are winning. I am convinced that many newcomers to the breed do not recognize a 12-16 lb Schip as there are so few about. Anything over size here stays at home.

#### **6. Don't breed from mediocrities. The absence of a fault does not in any way signify the presence of its corresponding virtue.**

**MD:** Well I am in two minds about this. Don't know if this is necessarily so in all breeds, as sometimes the gene pool is so small that one may be forced to use only average bitches for breeding. Notice I mentioned bitches only, as oftentimes a breeder is limited with space and has only the option of using what they have available. It is far easier, I believe, in 'breeding up' in quality, by using a top quality stud dog that is noted for putting his stamp onto bitches of various different lines. One would have to do some careful study before venturing into this type of program, and again be very honest as to what one wants out of it. Don't expect the stud dog to correct most things in one generation!

**MP:** It is interesting how a mediocre dog, with no obvious faults, may do well in the show ring. We have to be careful to avoid breeding for a generic dog.

**MB:** Usually, but not always, true. Many average bitches have become great producers her breeding is from quality animals. It is unusual that the "pick" bitch is available to someone new in the breed, but those people have often gone on and produced better quality than their foundation stock. There should be no need to breed to a mediocre male when quality males are available to those who do not own them.

**SS:** Even though a dog might have a strength that I like I have to look at the whole dog and if it doesn't meet my standard I pass.

**BW:** As a rule, this follows true. Back to the "self-deceit". Just because the dog or bitch is a champion...is NO reason to breed it!

**JH:** Mediocrities is a strong word and I would never advocate anyone breeding from a really poor specimen. However some animals may be less than perfect but still possess qualities that would benefit the breed. It's all about finding the perfect partner, knowing your lines and doing the best you can.

#### **7. Don't try to line bred to two dogs at the same time; you will end by line breeding to neither.**

**MD:** Yes!

**MP:** I am not sure how this can be done? Maybe breeding for two dogs within a pedigree? But if the dog is line bred, then those dogs should be similar.

**MB:** True. This type of breeding is an outcross unless the individuals are closely related. In that case, you are actually line breeding the individuals behind them.

**SS:** This looks like a big failure to me to try to line breed to two dogs at the same time.

**BW:** True!

**JH:** Agree

**8. Don't assess the worth of a stud dog by his inferior progeny. All stud dogs sire rubbish at times. What matters is how good their best efforts are.**

**MD:** I agree, unfortunately, it is very easy for other less successful individuals to use this tactic to 'rubbish' another kennel, by pointing out the less favorable specimens. No breeder has the inside track to producing perfect dogs.

**MP:** True, unless he has produced a lot of rubbish out of good bitches. You have to think carefully about aiming at getting one good "flyer" in that case. Maybe you are going to have to breed out many problems in the future, for the sake of getting one good dog.

**MB:** Assess the worth of a stud dog by his total progeny, and by the bitches they came from. If he is consistently bred to quality bitches and produces a low percentage of quality offspring, reconsider.

**SS:** When we look at a stud dog I like to see what he has been bred to also no one is perfect, neither is a stud dog.

**BW:** And, how consistent their best efforts are. And the percentages: How many bad bites, bad fronts, etc?

**JH:** The stud dog should be assessed by his suitability to your bitch. Some matings are a match made in heaven and some just don't work.

**9. Don't allow personal feelings to influence your choice of a stud dog. The right dog for your bitch is the right dog, whoever owns it.**

**MD:** Agree!

**MP:** I would suggest one caveat. You need to respect and trust the skills and integrity of the persons whose dog you choose, even if they are not your favorite people. If you do not, you are usually making a mistake.

**MB:** Very true. Goes back to the "kennel blind" issue.

**SS:** Personal feelings should not interfere with a breeding program. We should be looking for the right dog to breed to.

**BW:** Absolutely!

**JH:** I would agree totally with this but must admit I can't do it. In my own defense I have had reasons other than the owner not to use a dog but I know that has influenced me and probably

always will. I don't think I have lost anything by it and it has enabled me to abide by my own principles but then I can persuade myself I was right at any time!!!!

**10. Don't allow admiration of a stud dog to blind you to his faults. If you do, you will soon be the victim of autointoxication.**

**MD:** What a great word, love it, and agree with the statement. It is important for breeders who intend to use a stud dog to see littermates that have not been shown, to get a feel for what else the stud dog produces, in addition to the big winners.

**MP:** Sometimes breeds become very different from their original form because of characteristics passed on by wonderful, big-winning dogs in a breed. They pass on unwanted or ignored characteristics along with the desirable ones. (I don't see much potential for this in Schipperkes – they revert to the original types very rapidly!)

**MB:** True. And when you do the breeding anyway and watch his kids running around with that same fault.....

**SS:** All dogs have faults even though we may really like a dog we should again be honest with ourselves in knowing those faults.

**BW:** A wise breeder always remembers:

No matter how much you lie to yourself...it always comes back to haunt you in the whelping box!

**JH:** You need to analyze each potential stud dog before using him. His faults are as important as his virtues and both need to be taken into account. Rest assured if you try to ignore faults they will come back to haunt you, recognize his faults and you can work with them.

**11. Don't mate together animals that share the same fault. You are asking for trouble if you do.**

**MD:** This should be imprinted on every breeder's forehead, but backwards, so they can read it in the mirror!

**MP:** Faults appear even when we select against them. Why would we double on a problem??

**MB:** I agree, unless it is a very minor fault and you have corrected a major fault with this breeding.

**SS:** We can never say this too often. Know your dogs; do not double up on their faults.

**BW:** See above.

**JH:** This depends on the severity and type of fault. Two dogs with bad mouths would be an absolute 'no no' for me. Two dogs with oversize ears I can live with if everything else is OK. I am well aware that the ears on our lines tend to be a little larger than I would like but I have a lot of other things that I am happy with e.g. construction, shape, temperament so I can live with the ears. I will not risk bringing in other faults just to reduce the ears.

**12. Don't forget that it is the whole dog that counts. If you forget one virtue while searching for another, you will pay for it.**

**MD:** This is the one that the nitpickers of whatever breed will always forget. Look at the overall animal, not just one or two features.

**MP:** Sometimes an otherwise wonderful dog lacks something important in personality, or some other characteristic. We mustn't lose our positives.

**MB:** True.

**SS:** When I look at a dog I see the whole dog first, then I look at parts, then put them back together. It is always about the total dog.

**BW:** Again, a wise breeder always looks for balance first!

**JH:** Definitely. Always look at the whole animal.

### **13. Don't search for the perfect dog as a mate for your bitch. The perfect dog for every bitch does not exist -- never has, never will.**

**MD:** Absolutely!

**MP:** And of course the bitch is perfect, too – ha!

**MB:** Very definitely. And "perfect" is not the same in everyone's opinion. Just look at the type variety winning in the breed if you need to be convinced of this

**SS:** I like this one about searching for the perfect dog for a mate for my bitch. It just will never happen, so it makes the search a wasted effort.

**BW:** And if you get close, it rarely breeds true, as most breeding reverts back to the mean...

Meaning that most "outstanding" specimens rarely produce as good as they are.

**JH:** There is no perfect dog regardless of what we all think we have at home. Look for the best you can and hope for the best.

### **14. Don't be frightened of breeding from animals that have obvious faults, so long as they have compensating virtues. A lack of virtues is by far the greatest fault of all.**

**MD:** We are all faced with this virtually every time we consider a potential mating, and would do well to consider this over and over. Every potential parent in a litter should be bringing to the 'genetic table' some excellent qualities in their phenotype.

**MP:** If your line produces consistently sound stock of good type, and you have the dogs to counteract the fault, do it. (I am speaking chiefly about conformation. Don't do it if the fault will affect progeny's quality of life.)

**MB:** "Obvious faults". I think it depends upon the fault; it is hard to make a comprehensive statement on this. Just maybe she shouldn't be bred at all. And the "lack of virtues" goes back to the answer on #6.

**SS:** Since all dogs have faults we have to look for their outstanding virtues.

**BW:** Most "dog people" learn to find the faults first. Some of them, however...never learn to see the virtues. This can apply to judges as well.

**JH:** All dogs should bring something good to a mating. None are perfect and will bring some fault or other. The skill is recognizing the fault and having a plan to breed away from it in the future. Why would you want to use a dog with no virtues?

**15. Don't mate together non-complementary types. An ability to recognize type at a glance is a breeder's greatest gift. Ask the successful breeders to explain this subject --- there's no other way of learning. (I'd define non-complimentary types as ones which have the same faults and lack the same virtues).**

**MD:** I would say that this is one of THE biggest problems facing dog breeders today. Most people who have come into the game in the last 2 decades are no longer within the fancy of dog breeding/showing. The rest may or may not be fortunate enough to have a mentor, or even more important, LISTEN to their mentor! Too many people are tied nowadays into the culture of instant success, and want to WIN and that is all they care about. They acquire dogs from a number of different breeders/lines/types, but are only interested in ring wins. When they put these dogs together for breeding, then they wonder why they produced what they got. Listening to their mentor perhaps would have changed their minds, as it is the long-term people who know the pedigrees and have a better idea of what will or will not work.

Loss of discernible type/line is so evident today in so many breeds. It must be worrying for many of the long timers in whatever breed one thinks about.

**MP:** I have owned several highly inbred dogs of wonderful quality and health in several breeds, which produced excellent quality in almost all of their pups, but even their progeny sorted out over a generation or two into a variety of types. So as a breeder and judge, I am more than willing to recognize quality in a variety of types within a breed. We need the variety of other breeders' lines available to us. But some combinations don't work!

**MB:** I disagree. If you only breed complementary types you will produce only more of the same. A non-complementary type just might have the quality that you need to improve. A judicious outcross can work wonders.

**SS:** The Golden Rule: Breed only to complementary types.

**BW:** "Type" is the hardest thing to learn, and again, many never do. Most breeders will tell you it takes an average of 10 years in a breed to begin understanding good type...and your idea of the "perfect dog" will change as you learn and grow. And this is why it is important to continually evaluate your breeding program...and work with a great mentor and utilize their advice.

**JH:** Recognizing type is a gift and I really don't think it is something that can be taught. I see kennels that continue to breed from mediocre animals and blame their lack of success on all sorts of things other than their own recognition of breed type. Unfortunately when breeding non-complementary types together the faults seem to double up rather than the virtues.

**16. Don't forget the necessity to preserve head quality. It will vanish like a dream if you do.**

**MD:** Yes, we are all head freaks in this breed I know, BUT I would also caution against selecting it as the be all and end all. Far too many people DO choose dogs/bitches based on

head/expression. Yes, it is very important whatever the breed may be, as it is part and parcel of defining the animal for its type of breed, BUT don't forget the rest of the dog.

It has been my experience that if one is careful in choosing the correct stud dog/brood bitch, one can get back in the next generation the desired or improved head aspect that one has lost, BUT if you have a line noted for short backs, or good shoulder lay and length of upper arm for instance, once you lose it, it is SO hard to re-acquire. So I would have to say that I am not entirely in agreement with this statement.

**MP:** I have found it relatively easy to select nice heads in a number of breeds, and have not had to worry about this quality. The difficulty comes when I try to select for exact details. In my experience, you have to remember the whole, and never cross dogs with very unlike heads. (For example, the length of upper and lower jaws was shown long ago to be inherited independently when breeds were crossed. The results can be astoundingly bad!)

**MB:** Any forgotten quality will disappear, not just the head. Breed for the whole dog.

**SS:** Preserving a good head plus soundness, this has always been a priority. I want to be able to tell a dog from a bitch by looking at the head because I know I would not be happy with a dog that looks like a bitch.

**BW:** True! And besides that...who wants to look at an ugly dog all day?

**JH:** I have, in my time, been called a head freak as I really cannot stand a coarse head in a Schip. I don't like to look down on light eyes or 'evil' eyes or long snipey muzzles and will always be swayed by a soft, gentle eye. Having said that I don't really consider that the Schip is a 'head' breed, it is a feature to be considered in the overall package.

### **17. Don't forget that substance plus quality should be one of your aims. A fool can breed one without the other.**

**MD:** Totally agree!

**MP:** It is difficult in Schipperkes to select for intermediate substance and bone. A heavy-boned Schip may be attractive, but it is not typical of the breed. Yet the breed can revert to too fine bone readily.

**MB:** Yes, unless he was fortunate enough to have quality animals to start with

**SS:** Substance plus quality, this should always be one of our goals. Some people believe that they have to breed quantity to attain this but I have found it better for me to just keep breeding for quality and it's worked pretty well.

**BW:** And not recognize it while they are doing it!

**JH:** We are looking for a 'cobby' dog which to me implies substance but it should not be overdone, we are still looking for a 12-16 lb dog. Quality we should always be striving for. As for a fool, he can breed anything.

### **18. Don't forget that a great head plus soundness should be one of your aims. Some people can never breed either.**

**MD:** This should be our number one priority in any breeding program. And for what it is worth, this statement should have been listed as number one in Mr. Oppenheimer's principles.

**MP:** It is not ever easy to retain soundness, yet you must not lose type, head, and quality in trying to do so.

**MB:** Same answer as above.

**SS:** See #16.

**BW:** And why we should breed for the "balanced" dog!

**JH:** I certainly think that soundness combined with breed type and temperament are the most important things we are breeding for. As before, I have been called a head freak so I am always aiming for that but within the whole package not as a stand alone virtue. Doesn't matter how good the head is if the dog is unsound.

**19. Don't ever try to decry a great dog. A thing of beauty is not only a joy forever, but a great dog should be a source of aesthetic pride and pleasure to all true lovers of the breed.**

**MD:** Yes and what some people find difficult is to acknowledge that OTHER people may have this great dog. Having a wonderful example out there in the show ring or the breeding box should be a source of joy for everyone in the breed. Seeing such quality should be a true pleasure for everyone in the breed. I guess that is one of the main reasons why I enjoy judging the different breeds I do...it allows me the privilege of meeting some excellent examples of the various breeds, and pleases my sense of aesthetics to no end.

**MP:** Agreed.

**MB:** True. You need to be able to recognize quality in individuals that are not "your type" if you are to make improvements as a breeder.

**SS:** A great dog we should all enjoy and be proud of.

**BW:** Schipperke breeders need to work on this one! Back to the "excuses" thing...I didn't breed it, it didn't come from "my lines" therefore, the judges are dishonest, it only wins because of who is showing it, etc...To be a great breeder, one needs to stop with the excuses and brutally evaluate what they are doing with their breeding program! Then make the necessary changes to breed better dogs.

**JH:** It is always a source of pleasure to some to knock the top dogs. They are there for a reason, whether you agree or not. The dog may not be your 'type' or the owner may not be your best friend but sour grapes does no one any favours. A great dog can only do good for a breed and should be appreciated by all aficionados

**20. Don't be satisfied with anything but the best. The second best is never good enough.**

**MD:** That should be our aim. Why else do we continue to breed except in order to 'improve' on what we already have.

**MP:** One interesting suggestion for small scale breeders is that they should decide how many dogs they can maintain properly in their care. Then they should replace a lesser animal with a

better, whenever the opportunity occurs. There are not many top quality dogs. Letting poor quality dogs reproduce is a waste of time. Do consider that Oppenheimer wrote these suggestions before many genetic screening tools were available. Use them to know what you are dealing with in your stock. A beautiful dog with a crippling genetic defect is worse than second best. Mother Nature is not always kind to breeders. We have to select as rigorously for our breeding programs as she would in the wild.

**MB:** Sometimes even the best isn't good enough. Try again!

**SS:** Never be satisfied with anything but the best. This is what keeps us going, aiming high.

**BW:** Great breeders clean house often! Be honest with yourself. Have a breeding program...and know where you are going.

**JH:** How do we define the best? I don't think it is by show wins. Big winning dogs can be big winners because they are campaigned ferociously by owners with the finances available to do so. We all know that judges often don't have the in depth knowledge of the breed that we would like and can be swayed by outside influences. We are always striving to breed the one that is the epitome of the breed standard and the picture we have in our mind of a perfect Schipperke. It is because we are not satisfied with second best that we continue to breed and aim for perfection. In reality none of us will ever achieve it because once we have the perfect dog where do we go from there?