

THE DOG CAN'T HELP IT

If you decide to become a breeder of Weimaraners there are many choices you will have to make. One of the most difficult and most maddening is, "Which stud dog should I use?"

From personal experience, I guarantee you will continuously obsess over this decision until you make your final pick. Throughout the day it will interrupt your usual train of thought. It will be served up with your morning cereal, distract you from your daily activities and be waiting on your pillow to guarantee some sleepless hours.

There's no single bit of good advice on the subject of choosing a stud dog, but here's one thing to consider. Bear with me as I draw parallel to a personal interest outside the world of dogs.

If I'm asked to name a compelling interest in my life (excluding dogs), I will answer without hesitation, "Food." Being a self-professed "foodie," I'm often glued to the TV watching the latest cooking show.

I was watching one of these shows where a panel of judges critiques the cooking efforts of several chefs. In this particular program one of the chefs was an obnoxious, self-centered, loud mouthed individual who openly demeaned the efforts of the other chefs.

When the judges were deliberating about the merits of the dishes, one judge begrudgingly awarded first place to the chef who had annoyed everyone within earshot. This judge defended his choice, saying he discounted the contestant's abrasive personality and proclaimed, "I'm just here to judge the food."

His frustration and need to explain himself reminded me of a comment that I heard at a dog show. It was a show where the winning dog was owned by someone who was less than beloved. In fact, you might say, the winning dog was owned by someone whom others loved to hate. A competing exhibitor reacted to the choice of the winner with, "A dog can't help who owns 'em." A dog can be owned by a sinner or a saint.

Like it or not, there is a tendency to generalize the way we feel about a person to the dogs they own and exhibit. This cognitive bias is termed a “halo effect” and is a recognized psychological phenomenon. It is found in all aspects of our lives and is not relegated to only dogs. If we consider a person to be likeable, friendly, and affable, we have a tendency to agree with things they support. Politicians use this mechanism all the time to try to get us to vote for them.

While we try to be objective in our preferences in dogs, there’s a tendency to like the dogs of people we like and vice versa. This tendency can seriously undermine the choice of a stud dog.

I’ve heard people explain their choice of a stud dog by prefacing it with, “That dog’s owners are so nice.” It makes me want to scream. You’re breeding to the *dog* and who owns the dog and what they’re like is irrelevant. Breeding decisions should be made objectively and based on the pedigree and knowledge of the animal.

My advice on selecting a stud dog: If the devil owns the dog that is perfect for your breeding program, make a deal with the devil.

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