

The Ideal Rottweiler?

By FCI Judge Gerard O'Shea (Sweden)



justask@telia.com

www.gerardoshea.com

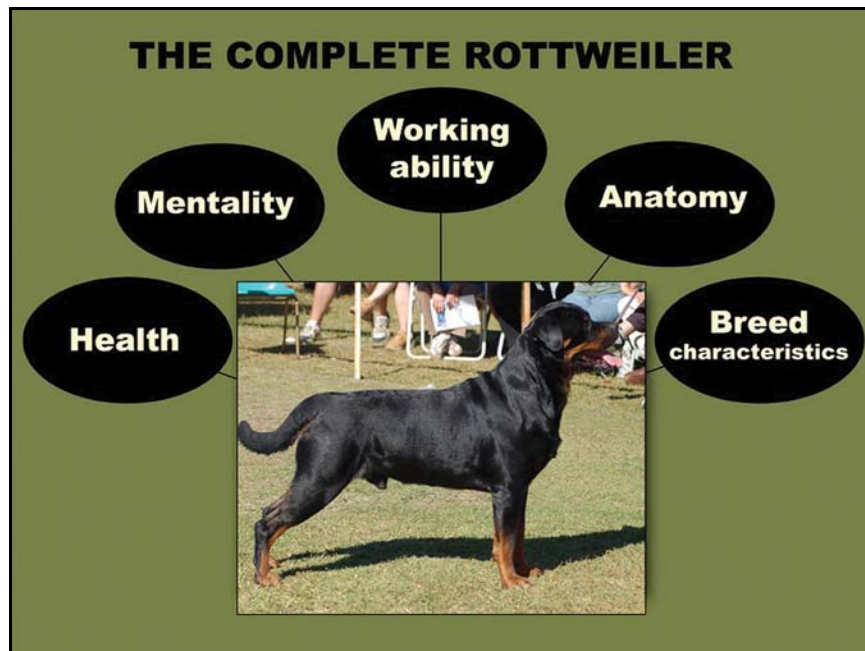
One of the most common things you hear said in the dog world is that the perfect dog has not been bred. I believe this is true in most breeds, as the perfect dog is different to everybody. In reality when breeders are trying breed the perfect dog the vision is very different from breeder to breeder and definitely from culture to culture. You see, I believe that what we hold as valuable or rather important in dogs, is what we are taught. All over the world one can often hear people expressing their differences in any given breed without thinking that most of these differences are what we are taught and that differs greatly depending on the dog culture we exists in.

If we step outside of dogs and take an example. I am sure that all of you can relate to this. When we judge people, especially on physical appearance you'll find that we have been influenced by popular media. In the early part of the 20th century, when young ladies when dancing to the Charltan, the ideal was short hair, maybe with a kiss curl, quite flat breasted low hipline, hiding any obvious feminine curves. Fashionable women of the day strived for this look. By the time the 50's came around, popular media was telling us that the ideal woman should have curves. Large breasts, hour glassed figures, the Marilyn Monroe-look. Shortly after came the 60's and its sexual revolution. Suddenly, we were back to no obvious feminine curves - Twiggy was not the in thing. Interesting how we can be so influenced by what we are regularly told is the ideal.

Something I consider now to be very fortunate is that throughout my dog life, spanning 30 years, I find myself changing my opinion on things that I was certain of before. I started in Ireland, although an FCI country, the breeding of Rottweilers is very much influenced by the direction and what happens in the United Kingdom, a nonFCI country, and definitely very culturally different to traditional European Rottweiler culture (which is FCI). After moving to Scandinavia and participating more on the European Rottweiler scene, I found myself in time adopting a whole new set of values. But, at the same time I tried to maintain many elements of the breed I valued when living in Ireland. When I started judging internationally, I began to see the breed in a broader light, until finally today I have come to the conclusion, taking into consideration what is required globally with the Rottweiler, is that breeding the perfect Rottweiler is a much bigger task than most of us ever dare to think about. Most of my close dog friends are breeders or fanciers of other breeds, so, of course, we constantly discuss what is so difficult or wonderful about their chosen breed. Much the same conversation.

The Perfect Rottweiler

You might say that my opinion is biased; but, I believe the Rottweiler is the most wonderful breed in the world and in order for us aim for perfection we have so much more to think



of than so many other breeds. There are five basic elements which we must consider when breeding the perfect Rottweiler. And this can never be achieved unless we concentrate on all five in our breeding program. So what could those five elements be? In no particular preference;

Health, mentality, working ability, anatomy, breed specific details (generally known as type).

Of course, when we look at the above headings, it is very easy, and probably preferable, for many breeders to manage their breeding program based on one, two or even three of these headings, but it is the breeders who value all five headings who are striving towards the perfect Rottweiler. So what makes them so difficult? To begin with, lack of solidarity and common goals amongst Rottweiler lovers throughout the world. Now this exists in all cultures, especially when we have extremists towards only one or two of the above headings. You can see people who are more fanatical only on show dogs, absolutely they can achieve very high goals in this area. Then you will have the working people saying things like "looks good, does nothing". Or "black 'n tan Labradors". I even heard one person say once when referring to a very beautiful bitch "Ah, it is a Paris Hilton - looks great does nothing!".

Standing beside the ring at the ADRK Klub Sieger show a few years ago, I was accompanied by an English breeder of show dogs, let's call her Miss B. Throughout the day Miss B constantly complained about how much running the dogs had to do and the lack of straight top lines (which by the way I agree with), and the fanatical attitude in which most people showed their dogs. I tried to explain the differences in culture but she was having none of it. Finally, at the close of the day she made a snared comment. "As far as I concerned this is just a group of working dogs at a dog show!"

I said to her with a smile "At last Miss B, - You understand!".



Working Ability

Then you have the people who are work, work, work. The problem here is although I believe absolutely that the Rottweiler is a working breed and should remain so, some extreme working people are willing to sacrifice quite a lot of breed specific details, or type, in order to achieve their goal. Comments one can often hear "black 'n tan Malinois, hyperactive stress bomb" or simply (with a smile); "I wonder what breed is it??" I suppose it is a bit like truck racing which is quite popular in America. You have these big trucks which are originally designed for great strength, endurance and agility despite their size. Bringing in a Ferrari sports car to race against these trucks, I am sure would not only be disallowed but would absolutely defeat the purpose.



There is just one more thing I can try before I take her away....

Health, health, health, are the individuals who believe that this should prioritize over everything else and can easily become quite fanatical, not so much in their search for health, but often it is to find the things that are unhealthy; "the glass being half empty rather than being half full". It reminds me of the time a young couple, having received their first pedigree dog, a Rottweiler, were constantly told of all the health issues that can exist in the breed. With regular visits to the Vet during the dog's first two years they proceeded to check everything that could be a possible risk, hips, elbows, PRA, cataracts, epilepsy, weak crocheted ligaments, osteochondroses of the hocks, kidney disease, maybe he has a heart murmur? Until finally, one day they asked the Vet, we think he might be deaf, because we heard that deafness exists in some bloodlines. The Vet finally replied; "He is not deaf, but I think have to take him away... Don't worry, he won't feel a thing." "Why, why??" The couple said. "If I put him to sleep and order a full autopsy, I guarantee you we will find something wrong".

In Sweden where I'm now currently living hips and elbows is

the dominant health skim related to the breed. To some people, anything that is not absolutely ideal in this area is referred to as "sick". I have even met breeders who say they will only breed to dogs which come from a whole litter of HD/ED-free dogs. And I must say have had quite a good deal of success in this particular health issue, but their progress towards the perfect Rottweiler is not so fortunate.



Isabel, the Rottweiler with Mrs. Erling and her two grandchildren

Mentality

I suppose so much of the mentality we are looking for rather than being breed specific has more to do with the mentality that suits ourselves. The mentality and behaviour of the owner is so much molded by the life they surround themselves with and this will reflect in what they want of the dog. Old Mrs. Erling with her blue hair, her tweed handbag and her weakly trip to Bingo, believes completely that Isabel, her 6 year old Rottweiler female, who is so sweet, loves everybody and would never harm a fly, spends most of her day lying on the couch being hand fed by friends and grand children alike. As Mrs. Erling would say; "She has excellent temperament, except for she would kiss you to death." Good luck trying to convince her that Isabel is anything other than perfect in her temperament. I suppose that Mrs. Erling is not much different to those show or working fanatics I mentioned earlier. It suits what she needs, so it must be correct.

Fight drive, prey drive, ball drive, hardness, and eager to work, full bite. These are the words most thrown around as Stephan describes what is so ideal about his Rottweiler's temperament. "Nice dog, Stephan", says Tom. "Really impressive work. Can I pet him?" "Oh, no no no. I do not like him being cuddled when he is working. Actually, I don't like him being petted. What's ideal about him is that he is a 'one man' dog".

As I said, the opinion of ideal mentality is seldom anything other than what is ideal for the person expressing them.

Anatomy

Anatomy, apart from the basic proportions of any breed which gives us body type, is the whole foundation of movement. If you observe the dog world, you will find that cultures which talk about movement most (ie balance, top lines, carriage, top lines, reach and drive, top lines, clean fore and after, this ringside culture is probably more dominated within the all breed ring. What is interesting is that they make very good conversation but do very little movement. "Excuse me Madame, once up and down and a triangle..!" Lovely top line, well-balanced reach and drive, clean fore and after, and now, once around. Well done - Best of Breed... The working dog showing us what he is capable of whilst in the ring.



Before you jump to any conclusions, let us look at a rather different culture. In this case, it could be over 50 dogs over a whole day running lap after lap, lap after lap, walking then running, then walking and running ... Common ringside comments; "Oh, dark eyes, lovely pigment. Shit... strong bone, masculine head, nice colours..."

Long detailed critiques is a must at these events. Every aspect to the breed. But after all that running, you will often find a simple description for movement, free flowing movement. Let us compare notes;
 "Mick, what does your critique say on movement?"
 "Free flowing movement..!!"
 "Shit, you got exactly the same as in my critique... Free flowing movement as well..?!!"
 "That can't be right", Sarah said. "I got free flowing movement too..?"

Maybe we all have free flowing movement?

Type (Breed Specific Details)

The word type is probably the most misunderstood word in the dog world. Perhaps because it has been misused again and again. What is type? In reality, type is the breed specific details or breed characteristics that define any breed. The interesting thing is, although the breed specific details are actually more or less the same even within the three standards (FCI standard, English standard and American standard). The type is often considered to be quite different, because of our different cultural ideals.

Or, let us face it; what it takes to win in that particular arena is what we prioritize on. Then, it is how we use the word type. For example, his type; her type; American type; European type; show type; working type; the old fashion type of dog; modern type; Eastern European type... The list just keeps going on and on. And yet, ironically, if we ever take the time to read the breed standard or standards, with maybe a little bit more open eyes, you will find that the breed specific details are not only more or less the same in all three standards, those people who disagree on type seem to agree on the breed characteristics if you ask them. Quite ironic really...

Today, the one element that seems to separate most countries when it comes to their pursuit of type, namely the show people, is an issue that is very trivial to argue about when you consider everything else. This, of course, is the issue of tails. Throughout most of Europe, there is no choice in this matter as it is illegal by law to tail dock in any breed, resulting in an acceptance regardless if it differs to your ideals. In countries like USA, it seems to be left up to choice; but, like so many things in life, when you choose, you fly a flag, saying which side you are on.

There was a time not so long ago that the American show ring both sieger style and AKC was a complete mixture of dogs from different cultural ideals. But let us face it; If the dog

had the right breed characteristics, and showed himself in accordance with the style of the ring he was competing in, he could always be a winner no matter where he came from.

Today, we see more and more prejudice related to the opposite camp, almost like it is as if the other side is trying to show a different breed in your ring. It has nothing to do with Rottweilers; but, more to do with politics, power, culture and the fear of losing it. It seems the extremism to which people will fight and defend these issues has no limits.

In Scandinavia, many years ago, when tail docking was first prohibited by the Department of Agriculture (not by the Kennel Club), the show ring consisted of a mixture of dogs with long tails and short tails. It was very much a transmission period. At one of the bigger Rottweiler shows in Scandinavia came a very powerful breeder who was absolutely against the long tailed Rottweiler. He fought many bitter battles with individuals, clubs, and even local government. But on this day, he presented a complete change of heart. So much so he would present a prize to the highest placed dog with a long tail. A complete turnaround. The show progressed 'til finally they found a winner of this prize. With applause and jublations, the prize was presented to the owner of the best long tailed Rottweiler. Encouraged to open his prize, he found inside a saw and a note that said; "Cut off that tail and you will have the complete Rottweiler".



A Scandinavian breeder proudly presents the range of trophies he has been winning with his dog

This brings me back to what I tried to say at the beginning.

It is the dog culture in which we are exposed to that forms our opinions and beliefs. So, the next time you hear somebody saying; "Bloody Germans, all they do is count teeth..." ask yourself this; If you were that bloody German and you grew up in their system and culture, would not you be counting teeth too?

With all our differences and experiences finding the perfect Rottweiler, even if he or she did exist, they would probably not match up to someone else's culture or ideals.

At the moment, I think the biggest threat in our breed is lack of solidarity. I believe that like any relationship, whether it is man and woman, mother and daughter, friends or dog fanciers, if we concentrate on all the things that separate us and that we disagree on, the relationship is doomed and will fail to develop. But, on the other hand, if we concentrate on all the things that unite us, that bring us together and that we agree on, the relationship will flourish even with our differences. And to those of you who read this article, I wonder what we have in common?

The facts and breeding obstacles will be discussed in the following issue...

Gerard O'Shea
Just Ask Your Dog
www.gerardoshea.com