

## Elbow Updates

Earlier this year I obtained the ongoing summary of the Elbow scoring for our breed. I summarise this in the chart below

Just like the last time we looked at these there is a mixed picture and without going into statistical analysis I give my interpretation below. There will always be natural annual fluctuations and individual breeding anomalies to allow for, so only the overall picture can be looked at in any meaningful way.

One thing that strikes me is that there are as many '2' scores as '1' scores whereas, if the overall motivation was to improve matters, you would expect the best score of '0' to be predominantly the highest followed by a tailing off down to the worst grade of '3'. We do have '0' scores as the most common and the '3' scores as the least occurring but in between 'numbers of 1' and '2' scores are equal and in several years the lower grade of '2' is actually more prevalent.

This is clearly not the normal expected distribution of scores so what does it mean? As always, simple averages do not tell the whole story and to me it suggests that whilst many are giving some serious priority to elbows and using lowers scorers producing lots of '0' scores there are a significant

<b>Bernese Mountain Dog BVA/KC Elbow Scoring 2011 to 2016 - Breakdown of scores</b>										
Year	Annual Total Scored	Annual Average Score	Score 0		Score 1		Score 2		Score 3	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2011	105	0.57	69	66%	17	16%	14	13%	5	5%
2012	131	0.79	78	60%	16	12%	23	18%	14	11%
2013	114	0.75	67	59%	18	16%	20	18%	9	8%
2014	133	0.65	84	63%	21	16%	19	14%	9	7%
2015	115	0.57	77	67%	18	16%	13	11%	7	6%
2016	99	0.74	57	58%	18	18%	17	17%	7	7%
<b>6 Years</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>7%</b>

number of breeders who are either not accounting for elbows at all or, possibly even worse, ignoring the indications and breeding from too many dogs with higher scores subsequently producing higher scores.

At this point I throw in the comment that of course people are breeding complete Bernese Mountain Dogs and not just elbows so elbows have to be looked at in balance with everything else. However, if poorer scorers are bred from it is not rocket science to expect them to produce, on average, poorer grades themselves. Whatever you are breeding to improve in any mating surely you should have some minimum standard cut off points to avoid producing dogs with problems. The KC would urge the use of the EBVs to assess the validity of using anything worse than a zero as these would help assess if that score was unexpected for it's background and therefore less likely to be passed on to any offspring.

Overall there are lots of little ups and downs within the figures but no obvious overriding trend to comment on as most of the figures are reasonably consistent over the period covered. All that can be said is that we clearly need to move some of the '2' scores into the '1' column and aim to stop producing '3' scorers. Many will recall from just a few years ago the BVA produced a report stating that our breed had a serious elbow issue and to improve matters only '0' scores should be bred from. Whilst most felt that this would be too restrictive for our gene pool surely if we want to keep pushing down the incidences of Elbow Dysplasia in our breed we need to keep trying to use the lower scores and not use the higher scores or dogs with strongly red rated elbow EBVs.

Another factor sometimes quoted is the imprecise relationship between poorer scores and actual clinical problems as some dogs with poorer scores will have apparently normal lives without problems. This may be true in a few cases but it is also true that there is much higher risk of problems in higher scoring dogs and those with higher scoring dogs in their lines.

I think everyone understands this is not an exact science, '0' scores will occasionally produce '2' or '3' scores and vice versa, but overall the use of the better grades will not only improve the long term picture for the breed but also take your breeding in the right direction and reduce the chances of one of your puppy buyers having to experience the distress of watching a puppy suffer this debilitating and painful condition and then have a lifetime of arthritis.

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