

The second International Dog Health Workshop (on Enhancement of Genetic Health in Purebred Dogs) 14-15 February 2015, Dortmund Germany

Breed Specific Strategies

Presentation for the workshop – Göran Bodegård SKK

Breed Specific Instructions (BSI) for show judges regarding morphologic breed type related exaggerations in pedigree dogs.

The international dog show scene is offering a wide and natural channel for implementation of breed specific health strategies which comparatively very fast could improve the show population of dogs (and consequently the breeding of pedigree dogs). The experience from Sweden from 2009-2003 gives a good support for the usefulness of the Special BSI design. This program is at present accepted and implemented by all the Nordic countries in the NKU BSI which is an integration of the countries' national high profile breed lists and using the principles and methods worked out in Sweden – which are described here.

*This presentation accounts for the Swedish experience (2009-20013) of a program aimed at increasing judges' (and breeders'!) awareness of **breed specific anatomical “areas of risks”** which can cause unsoundness and deterioration of function and health.*

*The main pillar is to understand and define **the breed specific Areas Of Risk** which are connected to the breed type characteristics as they are described in the breed standard. It is in the areas of risk you can find the find the breed type specific exaggerations that make up a threat for the individual dog's as well as all the breed's health and soundness.*

***Definition of Areas of Risk** for the single breed should be undertaken by: The breeders (Breed clubs) together with appropriate representation from the judges and the veterinary medicine establishment. I should not be defined and described by only one of these stakeholders and not be worded as a decree.*

The principle of recognizing and defining Areas of Risk can of course be undertaken for any breed disregarding if a breed is considered as high profile breed or not since the areas of risk connect to the breed type specific characteristics for the single breed.

***The definition of exaggeration.** An exaggeration is at hand when a breed specific characteristic is morphologically “overdone” as can be discovered by inspection and certainly when it hampers functions and/or physiology.*

In the BSI document the breed specific Areas of Risk are specified and suggestions/examples of the kind of functional disturbances possible to find within the areas of risk are given.

***In practice:** The judges are instructed to pay special attention to “inspection” of the Areas of Risk in the breed he/she is contracted to judge. The judge is instructed to report his/her observations (bad as well as good) in writing and is in thus way beneficially*

substantiating the dog show work into valuable knowledge about the situations in the breeds. The reports are forwarded to the breed clubs together with the individual critiques.

In the NKU BSI there are six basic criteria defining if a breed should be listed as a high profile breed. Breeds which full fill these and are thus listed are particularly paid attention to at dog show judging by the judge.

*The **Breed Specific Instructions** for judges constitutes a creative basis for development of consensus between judges, veterinarians and foremost the breed experts! Without a full agreement among these stakeholders a breed-specific health strategy is not likely to become working or successful.*

*It is also very important that the Breed Specific Instructions (BSI) are worded and expressed to the judges as **recommendations** and not decrees or rules!*

It is important to note that BSI thus constructed are not the same as or equal to the static lists of breed related faults which since long are used in many countries to promote healthier show dog but without success.

*A BSI is thus **not a list of faults and also not a manual** for connecting deviations to specific quality gradings.*

It is commonly accepted that the deviation of dog shows from its main and original purpose to provide a means for assessing and guarding of quality and type of pedigree dogs to an attractive competitive sport is the main reason for the deterioration of health and soundness in show dogs.

Judges and breeders have tended to prefer dogs with very pronounced and extreme (exaggerated!) breed type characteristics. The global increase in number of dog shows demands an increasing number of judges and this asks for guarding of the quality of the educations of dogs show judges. It is time we stop complaining about this expanding development as a root to all problems and instead try to adjust to the fact that the **dog shows now have two goals**: examination of the result of breeding *and* also being the scene for an attractive competitive sport.

At present there is an imbalance resulting in dog show judges not always being good enough in the dual aspects of their task: To be able to inspect and evaluate the morphological health related correctness of the animals and at the same time understand, integrate and practice the breed typical aesthetics which are/were the main motivations for the specificity of the development of the different dog breeds.

In recent years there has been a very positive focus on the judges' ability to evaluate and integrate such health and soundness aspects that are essential for the vital survival of the specific breeds. There is an increasing awareness of that exaggerations of type characteristics in many breeds are actually challenging the health and soundness of the individuals as well as the breed as a whole. When such harmful type exaggerations are the reasons for preference and rewarding of the winners in the ring the gene pools of the breeds are at stake as a consequence !

The responsibility for the negative development is complex but to a great degree dependent on commercial aspects connected to the increasing amount of dogs shows with insufficiently educated and functioning dogs show judges and too vague breed standards. The dogs show sport also seems to foster an increasing tendency of "dog show addiction" (

in breeders, exhibitors and judges...) which is a ominous side effect of the dog sport to individuals and families.

If the reason for the deterioration in health and soundness in pedigree dogs is to be found in the show ring this venue = the dog show sport is also the accurate place for the responsible repair and the guarding of the dual task of dog shows. The initiative undertaken in this line must be modern enough to adjust to the actual global dog show scene and not shy away from concrete action and excusing passivity by condemning the expansion of the modern dogs show sport. We – the stakeholders I.e breeders, judges, vets and kennel club organisations must inspect and repair our parts of this. – The BSI program as developed in the NKU is a substantially potent contribution in this line.

The awareness in many countries of the risks in “show breeding” has since long resulted locally in instructions to judges in the form of lists of high risk breeds and detailed warnings for specific faults and deviations. It is actually astonishing what little – or none – effect such initiatives have delivered on the top awarded winners in the ring and consequently the dogs preferred in the breeding programs. That way of approaching the problems is not good enough.

In Sweden we have since long focussed these problems at several general judges conferences – only to find there has been no noticeable positive effect until a quite new approach was applied: The Breed Specific Instructions regarding exaggerations in pedigree dogs (BSI)

The Breed Specific Instructions (BSI) identifies *areas of risk* related to the anatomical characteristics related to the specific breed type characteristics. The judges are instructed to pay special attention to “inspection” of the areas of risk in the breed he/she is contracted to judge in a selected group of “high profile breeds”.

The new perspective is to primarily focus the breed specific anatomical characteristics which in themselves contain a potential risk for unsoundness and lack of health if exaggerated – they constitute the breed specific Areas Of Risk. They should be particularly observed by judges (as well as breeders and vets!). The specific breed type characteristics depend on such genetic set ups which do not necessarily exist viably in nature! but they have been selected in the breeding by us humans for different reasons. Those genetic constellations contain genes which deserve to be labelled as defect genes. Evident examples of this are found in the genetic constellations determining brachycephalic or chondrodystrophic the dwarfed breeds and mollossoids.

The intention of the BSI is thus to increase the awareness of judges primarily for the “areas of risk” and then to the problems related to **exaggerations** in breed types expressed in the “areas of risk”. This is not effective in reality if judges are only informed about faults and deviations. – Experience has shown that this kind of information is working efficiently only if the judges are instructed to report their observations in writing and preferably also reporting their positive observations in the breed specific areas of risk.

It is the breeders which together with veterinary stakeholders and show judges who should **define the breed specific areas of risk** for the high profile breeds - This is coertaily also applicable to all breeds!

The selection of the breeds to be listed as high profile (risk) breeds is bases on six basic pillars which integrate show judges experience and opinions, veterinary medical knowledge, insurance company data (breed profiles and others), breed clubs’ information and consent, and the compiling knowledge from the collected written judges’ reports.

BSI is **thus primarily a complement to the breed standard and not a listing of deviations and faults. It is not a manual of rules connecting observed issues in the areas of risk to fixed quality gradings.**

The Breed Specific Instructions are preferably implies as **recommendations (not rules)** to the judge to observe and report problem issues as well as soundness in the areas of risk and **how/if the observations have influenced the quality gradings of the dogs.** The BSI program has been routinely applied in Sweden from 2009 – and at present generated more than ten thousand reports. From 2012 the program is embraced and worked through by all the Nordic countries and the latest edition (NKU BSI 2014) is founded on the compound experience in the Nordic countries regarding the identification of areas of risk in a selected number of high profile breeds during the last decade. The structure of the NKU BSI is thus actually an inventory which allows for a continuous follow up and dynamic revisions of the BSI.

The routine use of BSI is a practical way to implement updated general and specific knowledge into the dog show sport in order to identify and prevent breed type exaggerations challenging the health and soundness of pedigree dogs. It is the practical way to make use of the theoretical knowledge and aspects accounted for in the instruments and platforms created by the IPFD in the DogWellNet. – Since the dog show sport is global this scene principally offers a practical channel for communication and realisation of a handy method as described in the BSI.

Since the experience and results from the Scandinavian initiative show a number of positive aspects regarding the practical accomplishment of such a project it is worth considering if these principles can be of use in a wider international perspective. The principle of the method is easily applied but the list of breeds assessed as being at special risk must be based on national experience and cooperation with the national breed clubs.

It is important to remember however that the basic goal of the BSI program is to influence the dog breeding in a positive way by diminishing tendency for type related morphological exaggerations in show dogs. The positive experiences and results gathered so far cannot yet say anything about effects on the breeding! but in fact reflect the possible practical usefulness of such a method.

The positive outcome of these quickly established routines has created *a good possibility in theory at least* to influence the breeding of sounder and healthier purebred dogs. A potential positive effect depends on the appropriateness of the instructions and the compliance of the judges to give preference to dogs without type-related exaggerations - and that breeders ensure that such winning dogs are the ones preferred as breeding stock; in reality a consensual cooperation between judges and breeders.

The general perspective of the BSI is *preventive more than criticizing* by not only noting deviations but also instructing the judges to focus and note soundness in the areas of risk. Frequently occurring “general” faults which are not connected to exaggeration in breed type are not regularly mentioned in the BSI but are no less important in the practice at dog shows.

The BSI principle has since 2014 been adopted by the Nordic Kennel Union; this after two years cooperation by the Nordic countries. The NKU-BSI document will be implemented in all the five Nordic countries. The present NKU BSI document lists 39 breeds of the approximately 300 FCI breeds represented in Nordic countries. These 39 are selected from the 73 breeds deemed, by Scandinavian Kennel Clubs, as possibly challenged with a negative

development due to exaggerated features and fulfilling the criteria for listing. (The BSI Appendix 1 accounts for the criteria for listing breeds in the BSI.)
The present BSI document is formulated in accordance with the **FCI Basic Statement For Show Judges**, Dogs fit for their original function, approved by the FCI GC in Helsinki October 2013 and further discussed at the FCI Show and Judges Commissions meeting in Paris February 2014 where the attitude of the BSI to be **recommendations to the judges** and not strict compulsory rules was highly acclaimed.

Some of the key words that conceptualize the main points stressed in the NKU BSI.

Breed specific areas of risk - not list of faults nor a prize manual.

Recommendations - not rules.

The concept of **extreme breed types and their actual relation to Defect Genes**

Six Basic pillars for motivating the listing of breeds. The listing as well as the detailed instructions are made up in **cooperation judges breed clubs and veterinary authorities**.

Written reports of the observations

*

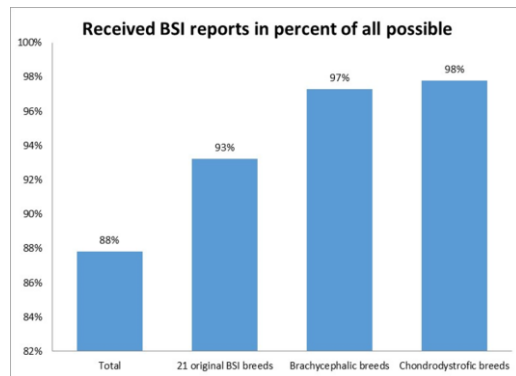
Some Swedish experiences and results from 2009-2013

The compiled judges' reports (now 10 178) create the basis for a survey as well as updating and further revisions of the listed breeds and the breed specific detailed instructions. The reports offer a good enough material for some statistics.:

- BSI routines were surprisingly easy to introduce and are working without problems.
- The program is not complicated nor expensive!
- The increased awareness of type related areas of risks vulnerable to exaggerations was quickly reached in judges and the other stakeholders.

Is the Scandinavian BSI-method applicable internationally? Are the beneficial conditions in Sweden a prerequisite for this to function?

BSI reports 2013- All BSI breeds



BSI reports 2013- All BSI breeds

Breeds evaluated 2011- 21 original BSI breeds now evaluated 2009-13

Brachycephalic breeds: etc...

Chondrodystrofic breeds: etc...



The diagram is based on the figures from 2013: Totally 2406 show entries for all the BSI breeds generated 2113 reports received (88%). Is this positive experience of real importance for the main goal of the program to positively influence the breeding of pedigree dogs? This diagram shows that judges comply very well (writing reports) and that the administrations work. Some breeds were not as well BSI surveyed as others: Boxers 61% collies 63-69%. Standard poodle 72% Cavaliers 77% compared to 100% or close in Brachycephalics and toys.

The BSI routines

Written detailed BSI information to the judges before the show

BSI briefings at the show

Judges are contracted to make a report/evaluation after each assignment of any of the listed breeds, based on the judges general international experience of the breed and what was observed at the present show.

The BSI-reports are compiled and statistically worked through and sent to the breed clubs for comparing report to individual critiques.

The list of BSI-breeds and the text are regularly updated based on the six basic pillars and the compiling information from the reports.

Some metric results

The statistic results based on the judges' reports are reliable, relevant and credible only if the choices of the areas of risk (BSI issues) for each breed are adequate and the judges are complying and able to inspect according to the ambition of the instructions

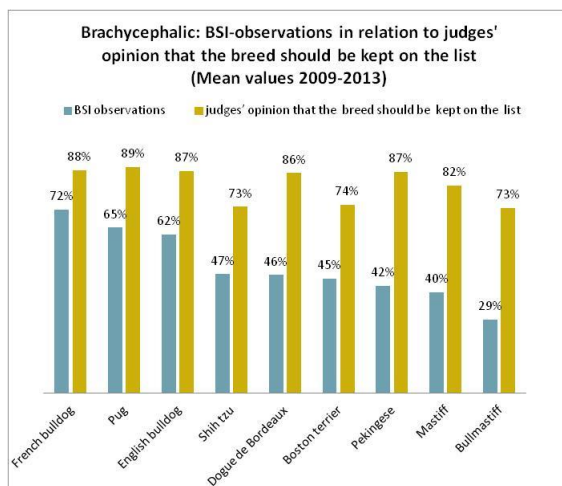
(The project is not strictly scientific but the reports are "good enough" for its purpose.)

The BSI routines have resulted in a significant drop at shows of dogs with issues in the breed's areas of risk. The judges' awareness has increased and the interest and loyalty of all stake holders are surprisingly great and positive. New vocabulary and concepts have increased value of discussions and debates.

1. General and significant*** diminishing of reported BSI issues is noted in the *show population* of the listed breeds.
2. But judges still want to keep the risk breeds listed although show population improves. 2009: 78% - 82% - 2012: 84% of the listed breeds were considered appropriately listed as risk breeds in spite of dropping numbers of BSI observations. This was most evident regarding the brachycephalic breeds (See diagram below) The instruction to the judges is: Use your general and international knowledge of the listed breed – not only what you observed at this show when evaluating if a breed should be listed or not.
3. Judges are loyal - Less than 10% do not manage well (practically - used the BSI as reason to disqualify – only about 1% were openly negative and discarding the whole idea)
4. It was easy to introduce the BSI program and make it work in the routine. (Good timing? And beneficial attitudes)
5. The cooperation with and the status of the **breed clubs** was optimized due to increased cooperation with the breed clubs regarding defining of the “areas of risk”, listing of breeds, the detailed instructions about areas of risk, the follow up of the BSI-reports and individual critiques.



BSI-observation –versus kept on the list



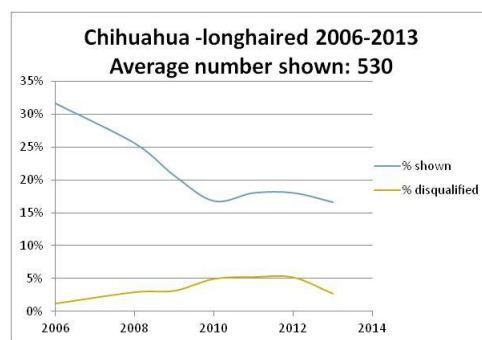
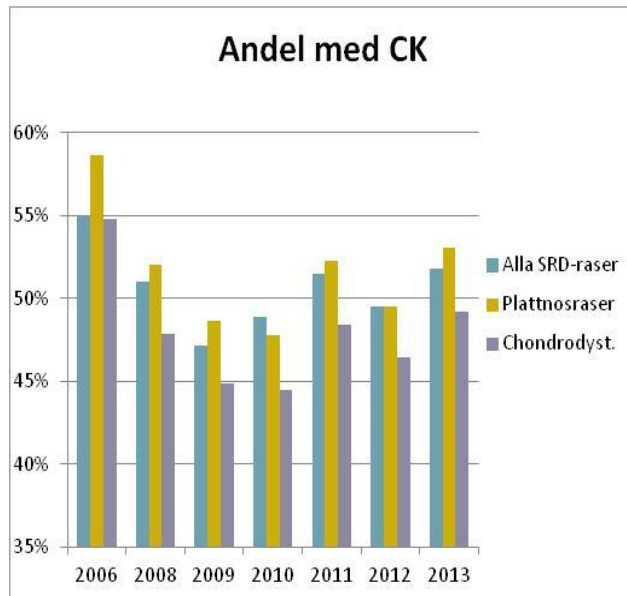
Do these results reflect a good international awareness in show judges about the general risk situations in brachycephalics?

The BSI observations and its relation of quality grading

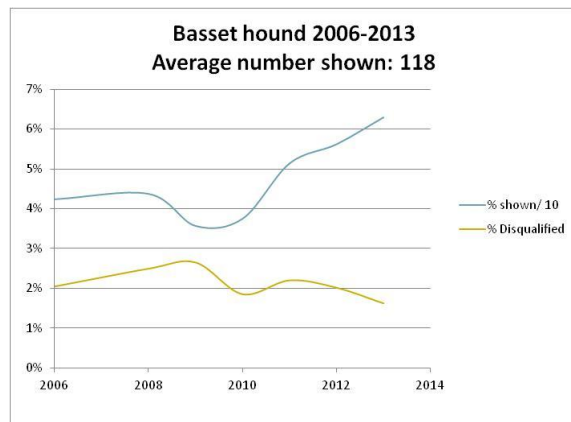
The occurrence of the flaws (BSI issues) can be reasonably well accounted for – and the judges' opinions and their compliance, loyalty and ability are well described.

There was a significant** drop in CK:s (certificate/champion quality) for all the listed breeds the first years after introduction of the BSI program and then a catch up! And there was also an *increase* in numbers of awarded ”Disqualified” after the BSI introduction

Percentage of BSI-breed dogs awarded CK



%Shown = number shown in a year / number registered in previous 3 years
% disqualified = are calculated as rolling average



The diagrams show that there is a drop in possible show entries in Chihuahuas and a parallel drop in “disqualified” – In bassetts there is an increase in possible show entries and a drop in “disqualified”

Some possible risks with the BSI program:

- The BSI encourage judging for ”medical correctness” – risks for impoverish true breed type. The soundness/health focus can deplete from the aesthetic of the cynologic cultural heritage if this is not looked after in the education of judges.
- Stigmatisation of breeds by listing them as deserving special attention?
- Increased administrative burden?
- Further ?

Conclusion remarks and items for discussion at the workshop.

The responsibility for the influence of the dog shows on the breeding must be shared by

- **Judges** - their knowledge regarding typ *and* health
- **The kennel clubs:** education of judges, policies for invitation of judges and increasing number of shows (causing dog show ”addiction”) and deciding the show system
- **Show committees** in their choices of judges. Are commercial ambitions prevailing?
- **Breeders and Breed Clubs.** - Their integrity *can* provide a protection against show trends and glamorous merits. – Is the attitude to ”breed characteristics” adequate or idealized?

Can internationally accepted breed standards improve the protection?

Yes but only if they are adequately respected and precise enough to support appropriate examinations of dogs.

How to create an international unanimous language and respect for the deleterious effects of exaggerations in show dogs?

- The dog show sport is global and thus principally offers a fast and practical channel for consensual ambitions?
- Aiming for internationally valid breed standards? Which are completed with BSI?
- Breed Specific Instructions (BSI) for judges regarding areas of risk due to exaggerations in pedigree dogs?

The NKU -model for how to construct a BSI can be recommend internationally - But each country shall make a national risk breed list with specific instructions so that the specific problems in each country are adequately accounted for.

Is an international list of risk breeds better? – and possible?

Possibilities with the BSI method

- A continuous survey of the occurrence and changes in the areas of risk in the show population of the high profile breeds.
- A survey of changes in quality awards in these breeds.
- A survey of the compliance in judges to the BSI and thus their respect for the risks of exaggerations.

Advantages

- Everybody has access to the document!
- The ”democratic” dialogue between the kennel club authorities, the veterinary expertise, the judges and the breeders fosters a common attitude towards reparation and consensus is built up and authoritarian decrees are avoided. Judges and breeders cooperate.
- Internationally comparable information can be achieved creating an international breed specific survey.

Göran Bodegård MD PhD

**Board of the Swedish Kennel Club, coordinator of NKU BSI working group
(goran.bodegard@comehm.se)**

Ref. : www.skk.se. English: Judging in Sweden: BSI and Swedish BSI Data.