The implications of the Kennel Club (UK) changes to the Pekingese standard; also Pedigree Dogs Exposed. Part 1.
October 15, 2008 — rufflyspeaking Railing Against Idiocy since 2004 by Joanna Kimball, Blacksheep Cardigan Corgis

OK, I promised I’d get to the Pekingese and UK Kennel Club situation and here it is. I’ve been stewing for a couple of days about exactly how to communicate what I’m thinking and worried about, and I suspect this will be a very large post, so settle down and get a cup of coffee.

This can’t be told without going back a few years. Across Europe-and this is a situation very unlike the dog breeding culture in the US-there is a feeling that government is responsible for pet animal welfare to a very great extent. There is an expectation for rules-making that would be considered invasive and even unlawful here. For example, in some Scandinavian countries bitches are not allowed to care for more than eight puppies; any additional whelps must be put down. Failure to do this means the “breed wardens” will throw you out of the breed club and quite possibly you’ll be blacklisted. It’s a very interesting paradox; the acceptance of dogs as part of normal life is higher there (for example, dogs are often allowed in restaurants and shops), there is a much lower tendency to perform “routine” procedures on dogs (including spay/neuter, although there are very few unwanted litters), but there’s also a much greater interference in terms of what dogs may be owned or bred and how and when.

Into that culture came the recognition of a term that, across all the countries I can find it, is translated as something like “pain-breeding” or “torture-breeding.” Pain-breeding is the production of a weird dog, basically. It’s when you breed a dog with a very short face, very short legs, long spine, lots of coat, or any other trait that could be seen to interfere with the dog having a “normal” (we’ll get to that later) life. Pain-breeding also means any kind of pairing that could possibly result in dogs that are unhealthy. This particular clause tends to affect those dogs that have possibly deleterious recessive genes but are themselves healthy (like dogs who carry for but do not express PRA, an eye disease), or those dogs that when bred together may produce a disorder relating to color (for example, breeding two merle collies, or two harlequin Danes, or two blue Dobermans).

Germany passed the first pain-breeding legislation that I am aware of, earlier in this decade. It forbade, among many other things, breeding two harlequin Danes or two dapple Dachshunds together, and outlawed a long list of breeds perceived to be either unhealthy or prone to aggression (which was, as far as I can tell from the German breeders, part of the same philosophy—it’s not so much “they’re unsafe” as it is “it’s unfair to the dog to breed them when they have tendencies like this”). The breeds forbidden were done so under the German Animal Welfare Law, which gives an indication of the philosophy behind the decision.

You need to know those three things—that there is a focus on a “natural” dog as opposed to an “unnatural” dog, that there is a feeling that any breeding that could possibly produce an unhealthy puppy (even if that puppy would be put down at birth) should be forbidden, and that there is a greater acceptance of dog-related legislation—to understand what’s going on in the UK right now.

Coming back to the present, this year the BBC sponsored and broadcast a… well, let’s very generously call it a documentary-style program, called Pedigree Dogs Exposed. It was a total piece of schlock journalism that basically can be summed up as “Purebred dogs? Parade of mutants! Kennel club? Moronic eugenicists! Breeders? Money-grubbing builders of gingerbread houses! You know who liked dog breeding? HITLER!”
I watched it and it’s honestly laughably inaccurate, both in facts and in conclusions, but it created a groundswell of dog-show hatred (and breeder hatred, and Kennel Club hatred) especially in the UK but around the world as well. The RSPCA withdrew from Crufts (and this is me being cynical here, but I believe this was their plan all along—the RSPCA’s vet was the one who called a dog show a parade of mutants). People were doing the Internet equivalent of running around waving their hands in the air screaming. And the Kennel Club itself... well, let’s talk about that in a minute.

That program “exposed” three categories of issues in registered dogs: extreme breed traits, inherited disease, and inbreeding. Let’s define extreme breed traits first. The program pointed out the issues they say are the result of extremes in face, legs, spine, tail, and coat. It strongly alleged that breeding for any conformational detail that took a dog away from wolf-hood was detrimental to that dog to the extent that it deviated from the wolf, and pointed out some specific examples: the brachycephalic head of the Peke, the curled tail of the Pug, the dwarfed legs and long ears of Basset Hounds, the extreme angulation of the German Shepherd Dog, the large eye of several breeds, and the ridge of the Ridgeback (which got an extra helping of hatred because some breeders put ridgeless puppies to sleep at birth).

Second, they targeted inherited disease. Here they pointed out the epilepsy that plagued a sweet Boxer and the malformed skull and mitral valve disease in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. Third, they made some really stunning allegations about the vague and undefined evil of inbreeding, which was said to cause horrible diseases and mental defects and infertility.

They served it all up with a big swirly topping of vets decrying deliberately breeding mutations and how terrible inbreeding is, and owners weeping over their sweet sick dogs. Well, the Kennel Club LOST ITS BOWELS. As far as I can tell, there must have been about twenty people in a boardroom having a complete fit. I’m tempted to call them naïve, but maybe it really is the truth that they hadn’t ever had charges like this leveled at them. The Brits LOVE their dogs, really adore them. So maybe the Kennel Club felt that it would enjoy the cozy approval of the entire country indefinitely.

And here is where the Kennel Club made what I feel to be a completely horrible decision and perhaps one that will end up being fatal to its role in the UK. It is a move that I feel indicates a genuine emergency on the part of the purebred dog community world-wide. Instead of responding to each of the allegations of the program and explaining where and how they were incorrect, the Kennel Club AGREED. It not only agreed, it promptly shifted blame to the individual breed clubs and accused them of cruel and inhumane breeding practices.

The breed clubs were, understandably, horrified. This is their parent club; they have always felt not that this was a boss but that the Kennel Club is the very best of what they are. The people accusing them of not caring for their dogs were once (and many are still) breeders themselves; the KC, it is felt, should have had the breeders’ side on this.

Specifically, the Kennel Club announced the following sweeping changes:

1) Each standard (the description of the perfect purebred of that breed) would be reviewed and changed by fiat as necessary. If you’re not in purebred dogs, let me just tell you what an incredible assumption of power this is. Breed standards do change, but they do so extremely slowly and the major impetus behind each change is the breed club (for example, the Pekingese Club), not the Kennel Club. The breed club typically has a Standards Committee and spends literally decades considering whether the breed needs even the most minute changes to the standard. I’ve been in on months of deep and passionate arguments about whether a dog’s elbow should mark half the distance to the ground from the shoulder or if it should be an inch above that. Some people believe so much in the traditional description of a breed that they will
The implications of the KC decision on Pekingese;  
Pedigree Dogs Exposed, part 2  October 15, 2008 —

**So what is wrong with what the Kennel Club is doing? Why is it such a bad decision?**

I want to answer this in two parts: First, why Pedigree Dogs Exposed was incorrect, totally and fantastically and horrifyingly wrong, in its conclusions. Second, what this means to the community of UK breeders and, because the world of registered dogs is in fact very small, to breeders around the world.

Let’s examine the assertions of the Pedigree Dogs Exposed program, one by one. I’m going to leave out the Pekingese stuff for now, because I want to examine that breed in particular in Part...
3. **Purebred dogs have radically changed in the last 100 years.**

Changes in purebred dogs are totally false. You cannot make statements about a dog based on a photo of a poor example of the breed! I can go find you a poorly bred long-legged Basset right now in 2008; doesn’t mean that the breed has changed.

From 1931.

See the front legs?

From 1950
Oh, and just because I promised, here’s a 2008 Basset (found this one on one of the Internet puppy finder sites, which means that now I have to take a shower to wash the skeeze off):

Moving on: The bulldog they say is the historic one absolutely isn’t. That’s a PIT bull dog, not a bull-baiting dog.

What they actually looked like in 1850 (look at how short the face is):
1936:

Bulldog: (1950s):
Modern (2007): This is a show Bulldog (a Polish boy). Look at the angle from his nose to his lower jaw. You can see that his upper teeth would be only slightly inside his lower teeth. Note that he’s actually more moderate than the dog from the 1950s!

This is the exact skull the program said was representative of the English Bulldog:

This is not only an incorrect skull but a grossly malformed one. The dog would have had serious trouble eating or living anything close to a normal life.
By the way, this is a skull sold by a medical research company, which would, of course, have nothing to do with determining the normative Bulldog skull. And it’s on the first page of a google images search for “bulldog skull”– the research done for this program was incredibly shallow and irresponsible.

This is the actual Bulldog skull, as described by the illustrated standard–in other words, this is the skull that is seen as the highest achievement of deliberate breeding:

![Bulldog Skull](image)

It is absolutely obvious that show breeders do NOT want the unhealthy skull, would immediately reject the unhealthy skull, and would be horrified by any animal in that condition.

2. **How about the Bull Terrier! They’ve totally changed! You can see how the skulls have changed through the decades!**

Answer: This is the skull series they animated to supposedly show changes (found, yes, in a google images search):

![Bull Terrier Skull Series](image)

It’s irresponsible of anyone to use that skull series to show that bull terriers used to look like X and now look like Y. That skull series shows exactly what the study says it does, which is that
dogs have an extremely plastic phenotype and you can cause rapid changes in a short period of time.

In order to say that bull terriers looked like X in year 0 and look like Y in year 30, you have to show far more than one skull per year and you have to find the NORMATIVE skulls. There’s a huge variation in type according to deliberate breeding (or the opposite, careless breeding) and I could find you identical skulls to every single one of those, all labeled AKC-registered Bull Terriers, in 2008.

Check it:

1. The “1890s” skull:

2, & 3. The “1950s” skull:

4. The "unhealthy overexaggerated skull"
The “hey, that’s pretty moderate, why don’t breeders do THAT” skull:

ALL of those are BTs, ALL are from the late 2000s, and the one who is a champion, the head they want? Yep, #4.

Here’s another example, a top-winning Bull Terrier from the 70s: still think the breed is in rapid flux?
3. Rhodesian Ridgebacks have a ridge, which is a form of spina bifida, and because of the ridge they have horrible painful dermoid sinus formations. If they would just breed the ridgeless dogs, they wouldn’t have this problem!

Answer: That statement was just categorically untrue. The ridge is NOT a form of spina bifida; it’s a cowlick. Ridgeless dogs do NOT have a lesser chance of having dermoid sinus formations. They are two separate issues. Dermoid sinus, by the way, is actively battled and bred against by good Ridgeback breeders.

4. Horrible Ridgeback breeders cull puppies without ridges!
Yes, some do. And I want to explain why. It’s not because they’re evil. It’s because ridgeless dogs don’t look like Ridgebacks. They look like a hound-pit bull mix. They are very rarely picked up as Ridgebacks when they come into rescue, so they’re not valued and are not turned over to purebred rescue. Ridgeless dogs are very likely to be put to sleep, assumed to be a dangerous cross-bred. Many end up as bait dogs in dog-fighting rings.

The fate of a ridgeless dog is far less than certain if the first and original owner does not act responsibly, and every breeder knows that you can’t always trust owners to act responsibly.

So, as a breeder, if you know that a certain percentage of your ridgeless puppies are going to end up living horrible lives of pain and confusion and loneliness and then be put to death, even if it’s only one percent, you have a decision to make. You can send them out there, trying hard not to think about that one percent, or you can make sure that their lives are short and painless and they never know fear or hunger or fighting. It is an individual decision that no breeder makes lightly. We LOVE our puppies. We ADORE our dogs. Every single time we lose one it is a personal tragedy. So while I may have certain convictions about what I would do, I have a
great deal of sympathy for those who make a decision that is different.

5. Cavalier King Charles Spaniels are unhealthy because uncaring breeders (who, it is pretty explicitly implied, enjoy causing dogs pain) are trying to produce a tiny skull that doesn’t leave enough room for their brains.

Answer: Nobody knows exactly why syringomyelia is a problem in CKCS. The round head type is not appreciably different from many other small dogs, including the English Toy Spaniel, the Shih Tzu, the Maltese, etc. Across the world, good breeders are horrified and are doing something about it. I would bet money that almost every health issue that the documentary pounced on was uncovered by good breeders, the research paid for by good breeders, and the population of good breeders is freaking out and trying to fix.

Note here: (<– linky)

Look at the summary of DNA research. Every single study is being paid for by the breed clubs of various countries, meaning that every penny is coming from the pockets of the breeders themselves.

No one is sure, yet, how to get rid of syringomyelia in CKCS. My sister-in-law owns two Cavaliers, a mom and son, who were given to her by a breeder who MRI’d the mom and found very mild signs of the disease (the dog is pain-free). That particular breeder was completely clearing out (finding good homes for and never breeding again) every single dog who had any signs of the disorder. The mom dog was imported from England, did well in the shows here, the breeder spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars on health testing, and then gave the dog away. That’s the kind of response good breeders are giving to these horrific diseases.

Right now the Cardigan people are tackling IVDD (disc disease). You know who has worked to describe the disease? Breeders. Who is donating thousands of dollars to DNA research? Breeders. Who is pushing everybody to do cheek swabs, bringing the swabs to shows, pressuring every owner they can think of? Breeders.

There is no body of individuals more dedicated to stamping out canine genetic disease than the ethical purebred breeders. Every year, the purebred clubs donate literally hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund studies to identify genes, they are 90% of the customer base for the genetic testing companies, they are the ones pushing for health registries, they rigidly police their own ranks and disavow anyone who is knowingly breeding unhealthy dogs. I’ve never met a single cross-breeding breeder who will volunteer their dogs for studies, but it’s commonplace in the show world. I have a friend who has driven her Danes hundreds of miles, twice a year, on her own nickel, for years now, just so the researchers can do serial ultrasounds on a related family of dogs. When the call goes out for cheek swabs and blood tests and x-rays and echocardiograms, show breeders consider it their duty to respond—never seen a Puggle breeder do anything of the kind.

The idea that breeders are sinister in this is absolutely untrue. There ARE bad apples. Of course. But when you look at the entire body of responsible breeders, it’s an overwhelmingly concerned and careful group of people.

6. It’s a symptom of how terrible CKCS breeders are that they continue to breed affected dogs.
Answer: http://www.cavalierhealth.org/smprotocol.htm is an absolute required read to understand this issue. It is a fact that if no Cavalier with any form of indent in the skull is ever bred, the breed will cease to exist. This seems to be a skull formation that exists throughout the breed (and is NOT, and NEVER HAS BEEN, the result of breeders trying to get a smaller and smaller skull regardless of the consequences). The goal of the protocol is to minimize symptoms and the expression of the actual disease, and to move toward a breed that has no skull indentation. Within this protocol, it is acceptable to breed dogs that have the skull indentation but are asymptomatic, as long as you are breeding them to dogs that do not have the indentation.

7. **There are a few good breeders, but most of them are in it only for the ribbons and don’t care about health.**

Answer: This really isn’t true. The reason that doesn’t work too well to ignore health if you’re a breeder is that it’s very difficult to exist on your own. You have to buy puppies, use other people’s stud dogs, and hopefully other people will ask to use yours. Since there is a huge, HUGE amount of peer pressure within the group to never lose sight of health testing, you will not be welcome. Puppies will not be sold to you; you will not be able to use stud dogs. Your own stud dogs will not be in demand. So you will not succeed consistently or at all.

I know the Dane world better than I know the Cardigan world, yet. So I can tell you that in the community of blue/black breeders, which is maybe 30-40 active and inactive kennels across the US, there’s a set of four or five “show” breeders that do not health-test consistently, or they do health test but they don’t make decisions based on those results. Everybody knows it and nobody will touch them with a ten-foot pole. The non-testing breeders all stick together and they breed to dogs owned by the other members of that group. They are not respected by their peers, nobody sends puppy people to them, and if we can warn puppy people away from them we try. They’re so shunned that most of the other breeders won’t even breed to something with those kennel names in the pedigree—those non-tested dogs as parents or grandparents taint even otherwise excellent breeding prospects, even if the offspring dog has finished its championship, even if the dog itself has health testing. Those non-testing breeders have effectively totally shot themselves in the feet.

So no, I don’t think that there are many more non-testing breeders than there are testing breeders. The dog show world is intensely political, it’s not really “fair” in many ways. It’s far from perfect. But the pressure to consistently health-test, in every breed I’ve seriously investigated or been involved in, is SERIOUS AND REAL.

8. **The show ring is the real evil; because it only looks for beauty, breeders only care about looks.**

Answer: The community of good breeders knows that the show ring is purely a place where the conformation of the dog is evaluated. Conformation is only one piece of the puzzle. We think that shows are VERY important, and goodness knows we love the gorgeous dogs who are the top winners, but if you are savvy and watch the dogs actually being bred, you’ll find that some of the top-winning dogs of all time have very, very few offspring. That’s because within their breed, even though the breeders recognized the beauty of the dog, it was not a suitable stud dog or brood bitch because of some health, temperament, or ability shortfall. That’s where the real question of responsibility comes in. Breeding only for looks is, for obvious reasons (that’s what they see on TV), what everybody thinks we do. But it’s far more
often that I hear “I’ve got this lovely bitch at home and there is literally not a male in the country I want to breed her to” than the opposite. It would be EASY to breed for looks and nothing else. But you bankrupt yourself ethically and you do a huge disservice to your dogs if you do.

The one place where I think that the program had some leverage with me was with the rears on German Shepherd Dogs. I happen to be a person who thinks that GSD rears are in terrible shape right now—but what they don’t tell you on the video is that the majority of everybody in the show dog community who are not GSD breeders thinks GSD rears are crazy. “My gosh, I can’t even look at them; they look crippled” is the most common show-ring comment. I HOPE that someday they get their heads out of their armpits and realize that it’s nuts, but I will say that even with the enormous change in preferred style, they’re STILL OFAing their dogs. They’re still testing and still breeding carefully. And not every dog is that extreme—I’ve seen the ones that wobble and I hate it, but I’ve also seen dogs winning that are, yes, overangulated and yes, too far down in the rear, but they can stand normally.

In any other breed, a dog who stood like that in the rear would go to the back of the line. Dog shows are NOT about health; they are about soundness. So you could have a dog with lymphoma win Best in Show as long as he looked sound and muscular and his gait was perfect. That’s why you always insist, as a breeder, and why you must insist as a puppy buyer, on health testing as well as show participation.

How about temperament? Any registered dog on full registration (as opposed to limited, which means that the breeder doesn’t want the dog shown or bred) who is not spayed or neutered can be entered in a dog show and can walk in the ring. That means there are absolutely dogs with poor temperaments in the ring. Again, this is one of the reasons that you sometimes see those top winners with very few offspring. If the handler is good enough to keep the dog from biting the judge, it can and will win. If it does bite, it will be excused and/or disqualified and after 3 DQs you’re done; you can’t ever show the dog again. Dogs that attack other dogs and do harm will sometimes be immediately banned, sometimes not. That’s why you never, as a breeder, breed to a dog without either getting your hands on him yourself or getting the opinion of someone you trust who HAS had their hands on him.

I would honestly invite anyone who is interested in this subject to attend a dog show. I strongly suspect that you’d not find a crazy freak show full of unhealthy dogs. I’ve said this before and I’ll offer again—if someone in the New England area wants to attend a show (to look at the different breeds, to see whether show dogs are abused, to see if this documentary is correct, etc.) and I can get there, I’ll walk around with you and show you what’s going on and what happens with the different breeds.

9. Mixed-breed dogs are healthier and have better temperaments than purebreds because they have hybrid vigor.

Answer: Here’s the way it usually works: Mixed-breed comes into vet. Vet says “I’m so sorry; your dog has osteosarcoma. These things just happen sometimes.” Boxer comes into vet. Vet says “I’m so sorry; your dog has osteosarcoma. It’s because he’s a Boxer.” Labeling plays a HUGE part in our perception of purebred health.

The other thing that happens is that people’s experience with purebreds-and this includes
VETS’ experience with purebreds-tends to be almost exclusively with poorly bred ones. How many actively showing, health-tested, hunt-tested Labs have you ever met? How many World Sieger Shepherds? If all you’ve ever met are badly bred purebreds, of COURSE you think they’re all unhealthy and squirrelly—they probably are, because they’ve been bred for nothing more than an certificate of registration, and with no more care than you’d use in choosing a pair of socks. An UNTESTED purebred is a very poor health risk, because if you’ve got two dogs on the street at least they have to be strong and sound enough to get tab A into slot B. Purebreds have no such restriction; a bad breeder will find some way to get the bitch pregnant.

There is absolutely no such thing as hybrid vigor in dogs. Hybrid vigor is a term that means that when you breed two TOTALY unrelated breeds, or even two species, the resulting babies are bigger, taller, stronger, healthier than either parent. So Brahma-Limousin cows, for example, are heartier than either Brahma or Limousin purebreds. In order to take advantage of hybrid vigor, you have to keep breeding the originals—in other words, you don’t keep breeding the Brahmousin to each other or they become just another purebred with no advantages; you’re constantly producing new ones using the two unrelated breeds.

All purebred dogs are about 150-200 years old, and they all came from the same place (Europe). Aside from a few primitive breeds like the Chow, genetic testing has proven that even the breeds that look old are modern European creations (much to the chagrin of the Ibizan hound people). Until 200 years ago, there was no notion of a closed stud book, so while you had some lines that were relatively pure, the fact is that if it could herd and looked mostly like a corgi it WAS a corgi, and the same dog in another part of England would possibly have been labeled as desirable Shetland Sheepdog breeding stock.

So when you breed a Labrador and a Poodle, for example, you’re not accessing any “hybrid vigor.” You’re putting back together two breeds that were probably freely exchanging genes no more than a couple hundred years ago. The hip dysplasia in Poodles is the same hip dysplasia as is in Labs. The genes for thyroid disorders in Dobermans are the same as the genes for thyroid disorders in Rottweilers. You’re right that the genes have to meet to be expressed—and they’re quite as likely to meet when you cross-breed as when you breed two purebreds, except in the relatively few breeds that have genuine issues with a few cancers.

I have four dogs in the house, all of which I love dearly. The Cardigans represent the best lines in the US. They have strong, enduring structure, their backs are not too long or too short (won’t break down under stress); their teeth have a perfect bite so they’ll always be able to eat, even in old age; their front feet turn out no more than 30%, so they won’t get arthritis. They’ve been genetically tested for PRA, heart, hips; I know exactly how long their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and gg-grandparents lived and what they died of (actually, thanks to the great good health of Cardis, most of those dogs are still alive). I have an accidental cross rescue, a dachshund/Jack Russell Terrier. He’s also achondroplastic, like the Cardigans, but in his case there’s been no care to make sure his feet don’t turn out too much or that his back is level and strong. His elbows do not touch his body, so he can’t run as fast or corner as quickly as they can. His feet turn out and are flat, so he doesn’t have the tendon system he needs to keep his feet from hurting when he gets older. I have no way of knowing whether he’ll suffer from eye, heart, hip, or spinal problems as he ages. I also have a “designer dog,” a deliberately crossbred Papillon-Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. She has cherry eye, a congenitally deformed jaw, and bowed front legs, and for her whole life I’ll have to watch out for glaucoma, epilepsy, spinal disorders, brain disorders, etc., because none of those have ever been tested for, as far as
I know, in her generations of puppy-mill ancestors. So from my point of view this is not even close to an argument.

10. **The dog on the program was so congenitally deformed that he had to sit on an “ice pillow” so he wouldn’t die!**
Danny, the Peke pictured, was on a cool bed, which is an extremely common tool used in the show ring to keep the dogs comfortable so they won’t pant. It’s got a gel inside that is at room temperature but helps transfer heat, and it feels pleasant to the dog, like lying on a tile floor. Some exhibitors will put an ice pack under the bed to cool it off. We don’t want them to pant because an open mouth makes a bad picture. Judges can’t see the profile of the dog’s head properly if the dog is panting; the dog can’t show an alert or pretty expression when it is panting. We like to have a nice photograph, too; it’s important to us as breeders that photos show our dogs at their best. Danny was in no danger of overheating. It had been a very long day for everyone; Danny was going to need to have his picture taken hundreds or thousands of times and was under hundreds of lights. That made him pant, so his handler wisely let him lie down on a cool bed. No dog would ever lie down on an actual ice pack, any more than you’d lie down on a block of ice.

11. **Purebreds are so deformed that they have to be bred by AI and have c-sections!**
There’s a huge difference between “have to be” and “usually are.”
Good breeders typically get one or two or three litters from each female. Every single litter is extremely precious and represents the investment of years of effort and thousands and thousands of dollars, and we LOVE our breeding bitches. That means that we have a very low tolerance for the risks associated with breeding.

So a large proportion of ALL breeders, across ALL breeds, preferentially use AI (either “fresh,” where the male is collected right there and the bitch immediately inseminated, or surgical). They don’t want to risk infection, injury (I’ve had a male injured during breeding, so I know this happens), or the possibility that either dog won’t get the job done.

Pekingese CAN breed normally, but their breeders are very worried about the possibility of injury when the two dogs involved are short and heavy, so they do AIs. As I said, this is true across the spectrum of breeds including those very “natural” in shape and size.

There are SO many reasons that dogs end up with sections, and some are a “weakness” and others are not. The c-sections we had with the Danes were on a mother and daughter; the mom’s section was because she had dead puppies inside that had set up a huge infection; she delivered five live and five dead puppies and I sectioned her for the last (live) puppy. Her daughter’s labor stalled out, and when the vet opened her up she found the puppies “shrink wrapped” in an extraordinarily tight uterus (she actually had to be spayed to get the puppies out). For each, if I had let the labor progress she would eventually have delivered. But we would have had what I considered, at the time, exhausted and terrified, too high a chance of losing puppies or mom. Objectively, looking back, I don’t know.

Neither bitch could be bred again, obviously (massive infection and scarring, mandatory spay), but even though this was in mom and daughter I don’t think I would have called it a genetic weakness.

If you have a whole bunch of related dogs who are all ending up with primary inertia—yup, I’m
willing to call that a genetic problem. But the number of times I’ve actually seen that isn’t high. Most of the times when you have a high incidence of c-sections it’s for slow labors, which IS something I’d love to have erradicated in purebreds, but the reason they’re sections is that it’s a nervous breeder who sections quickly and for any reason that could possibly lead to puppy death (ummm, guilty as charged).

And of course a true dystocia you’ve got to section or everybody dies.

I’m honestly not sure there’s ANY data about c-section frequency in dogs. I’ve certainly never seen a study or seen a study referred to. You have to understand that c-sections in dogs are run entirely by breeder judgment; except for the very rare complete dystocia, these are ALL breeders making the decisions. So rates are heavily, probably almost completely, influenced by personal comfort levels and not necessarily by any kind of medical reality.

Let me give you an example: I have a friend, a GREAT breeder, who breeds Mastiffs. She sections every bitch, every time. They do not get a trial of labor, nothing. For her, losing a puppy is absolutely unacceptable. She also needs the predictability of being able to take two weeks off work for each litter. So she progestone tests, knows the day of ovulation, schedules the section for the exact day when delivery should occur (this is actually OK in dogs–there’s not a wide range like there is in human women), and sections every bitch.

So she’s got multiple generations getting multiple c-sections. But *could* those bitches have free-whelped? Quite possibly. She could, in fact, have the freest of free-whelping Mastiffs in the entire country, but the stats would not reflect that.

I have another friend, a Bull Terrier breeder, who NEVER sections except for a complete dystocia/malpresentation. She wants the bitch to whelp no matter what. She’s lost large proportions of entire litters during the whelping process; almost every litter has at least one or two stillborns. So are her dogs statistically complete free-whelpers? Absolutely. Would they be free-whelpers if they lived in my house? VERY doubtful.

Pekingese (and bulldogs and pugs and so on) CAN free-whelp. But they will lose puppies if they do, and these are already breeds who cost a huge amount (not just in money) to get pregnant and who have small litters. A single stillborn represents half the litter, often. When canine c-sections are relatively safe and ensure that you get every puppy out alive, for many breeders (across ALL breeds) and or many repro vets, this decision is absolutely understandable.