



Finding “Mr. Right” for your “Princess”

Resources for preserving Aussie health

Public-Access Canine Health Databases can help answer your questions

By C.A. Sharp, President, Australian Shepherd Health & Genetics Institute, Inc.

The decision to breed dogs brings with it many responsibilities. Dedicated breeders take care of their dogs’ physical needs, properly socialize their puppies, and screen prospective buyers. They place their puppies in good homes and maintain a lifelong commitment to the animal.

Another area of responsibility assumed by the dedicated breeder is a commitment to the health of their breeding stock and puppies. Conformation traits, working ability, and temperament are routinely factored into deciding on breeding pairs. Health concerns need to have an equally important role in choosing the best sire for your next litter.

Health problems can reduce lifespan, limit or end competition or working careers, cause misery for the dog, and create heartache for the owner. Breeders now have tools to help them avoid some genetic health pitfalls, so they can produce the healthiest puppies possible.

Tracking our breed’s major health issues, as well as less common ones that may occur in specific bloodlines, is vital. There’s tremendous value

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in knowing not only the qualities of your own dogs, but also those of their offspring, siblings, parents, and extended families. For example, if a dog has good hips but three littermates are dysplastic or produced dysplastic offspring, a breeder may choose not to use that dog in a breeding program. Gathering this information requires effort, but there are tools available that will help.

Fifteen years ago, researching the health of dogs on a pedigree was no easy matter. Often a breeder had to depend on whatever information people were willing to share—if they were willing to share. Today, breeders have online access to U.S. and European canine health databases that contain tremendous amounts of health information on thousands of dogs. Now it's possible to work hand-in-hand with Aussie breeders across the ocean to protect the health of our breed.

Aussies became popular in Europe in the mid-1980s and U.S. and Canadian exports to Europe are still common. Most European dogs are within a few generations of North American dogs, so all resources can be pertinent wherever you live.

There are a number of major health data sources that can help you on the path to your own pedigree-based health research.

Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA)

The major U.S. health registry, OFA has been in existence since the 1960s. It initially focused on hip dysplasia and other orthopedic screenings. Today they include an eye registry and registries for a variety of other diseases and defects. For Aussies, this includes orthopedic, eye, heart, and thyroid screening as well as some DNA test results. A flexible search page allows you to select individual dogs, groups of dogs, particular health screenings, or a combination of these. This registry is semi-open so non-passing results are shown only with the owner's permission.

<https://www.ofa.org>

International Directory for Australian Shepherd Health (IDASH)

There is a publicly available, Aussie-specific health registry. IDASH is a program of the Australian Shepherd Health and Genetics Institute (ASHGI), a U.S.-based organization that is international in scope. One segment of IDASH is its Open Health Database (OHD) which contains data on health screenings, DNA test results, inherited diseases, dental faults, and disqualifying colors on over 25,000 Aussies. The data comes from other health registries as well as submissions by owners and breeders. It also offers a pedigree service, including a "health pedigree" with links any OHD records available. A pedigree analysis service for dog owners that issues reports including the dog's coefficient of inbreeding and relative risk scores for over two dozen health, dental and disqualifying color traits.

www.ashgi.org/open-health-database-search/idash

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Svenska Kennelklubben (SKK)

The Swedish kennel club has been at the forefront of proactive management of genetic diseases in dogs for decades. Their registry is open (all results) and includes orthopedic and eye exams. The site is in Swedish, but Google Translate can get you where you want to go. Once you locate a dog that interests you there's a button that takes you to its health information.

hundar.skk.se/hunddata/Hund_sok.aspx

Finska Kennelklubben (FKK)

The Finnish kennel club has a website offering similar features to the SKK site but they also have an English language version. All information on a dog (pedigree, health results, competition results, offspring and sibling lists) appears on a single page. One advantage this site has is the ability to move between pages for related individuals by simply clicking on their names.

jalostus.kennelliitto.fi

L'Ente Nazionale della Cinofilia Italiana (ENCI)

The Italian Kennel Club offers pedigrees and owner-provided screening results. It is only in Italian, so keep Google Translate handy until you learn where to click. You search using the dog's registered name and breed or one other identifier. Health results, if available, can be reached via a button above the pedigree.

www.enci.it/libro-genealogico/libro-genealogico-on-line

Club Francais Berger Australien (CFBA)

The French FCI club posts PDF listings of hip, elbow, eye and DNA test results, passing or not. The reports are in need of updating, but contain thousands of individual records on French-registered dogs. They are in French but should be relatively easy to understand even if you don't read the language. CFBA is also, to my knowledge, the first and only



MACH ADCH-Bronze PDCH ATCH3 NATCH Top Rail's Keeper of the Stars "Echo." She passed away at 17½ years of age and was never sick a day in her life! - Marcy Rauch.

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“Without proper health clearances, good breeding programs, and conscious breeders, we would not have healthy pups to start with. It takes a healthy diet, proper exercise, and mental stimulation to raise an Aussie that will be in your life for many, many years. It’s not just the breeders or just the environment the dog is raised in...it takes all of us to come together to make all the right things happen. It takes a village.”

- Kathy Kellogg

national breed club to develop an epilepsy registry. Participation is voluntary and only cases supported by veterinary documentation will have their names and pedigrees displayed (over two dozen as of this writing).

Epilepsy registry:

- › <http://www.epi-cfba.com/la-base-de-donneacutees-francedilaise.html>

Health reports:

- › **Hip Dysplasia, Elbow Displasia, Eyes, CEA, HSF4, PRA:**

<http://secretaire.cfba.free.fr/cte/PUBLICATION%20SANTE%20par%20ALPHA.pdf>

- › **Cone Degeneration:**

<http://secretaire.cfba.free.fr/cte/PUBLICATION%20ADN%20CDm.pdf>

- › **MDR1:**

<http://secretaire.cfba.free.fr/cte/PUBLICATION%20ADN%20MDR1.pdf>

- › **Natural Bob Tail (NBT):**

<http://secretaire.cfba.free.fr/cte/PUBLICATION%20ADN%20QC.pdf>

The Kennel Club (KC)

The English Kennel Club offers a health information search service. You must enter the dog’s full registered name exactly or the KC registration number. That will take you to a page listing the dog’s orthopedic and eye screening results plus certain DNA tests. They offer several reports comparing the dog’s test results with those of near relatives.

www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/mateselect/test/Default.aspx

Other kennel clubs

Kennel clubs in some other countries, including Germany and Switzerland, require breed clubs to collect certain health information so that it may be printed on pedigrees. Every official pedigree shows the information on each dog that was available at the time the pedigree was printed.

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“Health and longevity are really important for breeders to pay attention to. We can make smart choices by selecting dogs from pedigrees with good longevity and health, and cross our fingers that we do right by each future generation we produce.”

- Pat Zapf

Australian Shepherd Klub Austria (ASK)

Once a regular breed club, ASK has morphed into a health organization. They work with the Austrian FCI club and serve as an ASHGI liaison for German-speakers in Europe who aren't fluent in English. Their website offers health information and resources. It's a good example of what health-conscious groups in small countries can do to keep Aussie owners and breeders informed.

ask.or.at

Australian Shepherd Club Nederland (ASCN)

ASCN maintains a pedigree and health database for its members that currently holds over 18,000 dogs. It includes Dutch-bred Aussies and their ancestors, pedigrees up to 10 generations, behavior tests, conformation evaluations, and health records that have been voluntarily submitted by members—including evaluations of some entire litters. The data includes hip and elbow dysplasia grades, eye health, MDR1 status, DNA results, inbreeding coefficient, bites and teeth, excessive white, tail length, and date of death.

The purpose of the database is to preserve health records and provide breeders with a resource for making knowledgeable decisions about choosing breeding stock. While not available to the general public, ASCN's database is a shining example of what a motivated club and its members can accomplish for the good of the breed.

The Club for Australian Shepherd Germany e.V.

(FCI) The club established a database that stores the health test results required for breeding allowances on over 5,000 Aussies. Other health problems that are reported to the club, such as epilepsy, are also recorded. Life span is documented, health surveys can be generated, and analysis of inbreeding coefficients is offered. Health statistics are documented in the yearly official stud book and health clearances are published in the club newsletter.

The club also established a health fund to provide financial support to owners of puppies who develop serious illnesses. For each puppy bred by a club member, the breeder donates money to the fund. Documented illnesses from this fund are stored in the database and are made official in the club newsletter.

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Like this booklet? Learn more!

- ◇ Make better breeding decisions by **truly understanding** the influential sires and dams in your Aussie's pedigree.
- ◇ Don't make mistakes by repeating an influential sire or dam many times. **Know** where they are in your bloodlines.
- ◇ Find out which **desirable traits** were passed down through many generations.

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On the left is DreamCatcher's Sendoa of Zoriah "Zori." On the right is Milwin's Blue Summer Pleasure "Summer" who was 14 years and 4 months old in the photo. She was my best friend through some of the most difficult times in my life. Her health and longevity were so important to me because I wanted her to have the best, most comfortable, and most-loved life she could possibly have. - Pamela Mason White.

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