

TO CREAM OR NOT TO CREAM, THAT IS THE QUESTION

by: F.P.A. Odenkirchen

I think I should start out with a bit of a philosophical preamble to explain my approach to breeding Chows. A constant factor in my thinking over the past 43 years has been an opposition to "accepted" opinions. In a democracy, authority cannot be imposed, but has to be justified without destroying the independence of those fanciers whose convictions appear to be at variance with mainstream thinking. Any organization which does insist on uniformity, promotes intolerance and eulogizes mediocrity. I therefore found it always unacceptable that others should claim to know better than I on how to improve my stock.

However good, intentions are no substitute for realism. I have hinted at that in the brief I presented at the International Chow Chow Conference on October 23, 1999, in Coventry, England. A copy of this presentation can be found in the 1999 edition of *The Chow Chow Annual*. It deals with Breed Essence as distinct from its Standard and it would be helpful for the reader to avail himself of a copy before continuing with this article. The point that I tried to make was that if changes in our Standard, either gradual or more directly, cease to reflect the essence of our breed, we are in the process of destroying it. I therefore believe that any change or rectification of our Standard should not deteriorate into a contest between promoters and adversaries of certain characteristics, but should be the result of an objective review of the breed's origin rather than on subjective appearance preferences.

For those who believe in the purity of our breed, it may come as a shock that our Western Chows are far from purebred. When I was in China this year, I came across a Chow on a fishing boat. It was of a dark red color, of medium size and would be considered a smooth in Western Countries. As there are no Chow kennels in China, what was remarkable about this dog was its perfect pigmentation. When I expressed my surprise about this, my Chinese hosts offered a remarkably simple explanation. They said that in China, dogs had a purely utilitarian role and China had no history of importing foreign breeds. Ergo, it was politely suggested that our "Improvements"

have been obtained through covert introduction of Western breeds.

Back in 1990, TV exposés like ABC's "20/20" and newspaper articles in the Detroit News and San Jose Mercury News exposed the serious conflict of interest AKC has with the administration of the registry of purebred dogs, since the primary income of the Club comes from registration fees, including some 7% in earnings from pet-store sales. Even though initially AKC downplayed the severity of the problem, Alan Stern nevertheless estimated that 20% of dogs registered by AKC in 1988 came from puppy mills. This was in sharp contrast with the opinion of Robert Baker of the Humane Society, who estimated that half the dogs in the AKC registry were there fraudulently. More recently David Merriam, AKC Chairman, stated on February 11, 2000, and I quote: "Our experience with DNA in the compliance audit program taught us that 84% of the litters we found necessary to exclude from our registry because of incorrect pedigrees, were caused by false sires." This sounds familiar, as I am personally aware of the false sire of one of our frequently used Supreme Chows in the U.S. The reason that I never reported this to AKC was because, by the time I had proof of the incident, a fair number of litters from this dog had been dispersed all over the country and a lot of innocent fanciers would have been hurt. The fact is that these things happen and more often than some of you might think, as it has now been scientifically proven through AKC's DNA testing program.

There is no history of Chows being directly imported into the U.S. from China. Most of the original American Chow kennels were founded on breeding stock introduced from England by the likes of Mrs. Earl Hoover with Int. Ch. Choonam Brilliantine of Manchoover, Victorious of Tien H'Sia, Nee Phos of Manchoover and the CREAM male Snowboy of Manchoover, to name a few. Some of the others were: Mr. Hartwell with his English bred Am. Ch. Chang of Kang Shi, Mrs. Robert Appleton with Am. Ch. Radiant of Tien H'Sia and Mrs. Adnah Neyhart, who imported the male Ad Hok back in 1907. It is therefore obvious that our North



American Chows are irrevocably linked to the early history of the breed in England and to maintain its essence, we have to focus on the full spectrum of characteristics of the early imports from China and their immediate offspring. From time to time we are confronted with unsubstantiated claims which are both false and at times malicious, but when repeated often enough appear to have become gospel. Such as, 'there were never any smooths in North America and the reason there are now so many of them is because they were obtained by crossings with Shar Pei's, etc.' Indeed, these crosses have covertly taken place, but only by Shar Pei fanciers in an effort to save their breed by extending their genetic base beyond the original 15, quite poor, specimen imported from Hong-Kong. Their mixes have obviously not been limited to Chows, as evidenced by some long coated, brush coated, spotted, saddled, tan-pointed, piebald and prick eared specimen. However, such typical Shar Pei characteristics as ears flat against their head, muzzle shape, persistent severe entropion and chronic dermatitis as a result of excessive skin folds would be disastrous, as well as quite obvious, if introduced into any Chow bloodline.

Also, the claim that the use of creams would unavoidably result in pigmentation loss is patently false, as every color variety has produced this problem from time to time, and could more likely be blamed on covert introduction of different breeds, either by unscrupulous breeders such as puppy mill operators, or at one time by design to enhance the appearance. Indeed,

one only has to compare pictures of the original imports with some of today's extremes to suspect that pigmentation problems are more likely the result of the insidious use of dogs with less than perfect eyes, nose and mouths for breeding purposes.

To date, we have owned and bred about 50 creams at Mi-Pao and none, *ever* produced spotted tongues or light eyes in their offspring, not even when breeding cream to cream. Neither did they ever produce off noses in our reds and blacks. Nose pigmentation of our creams has proven to be strain related and those with black noses can all be traced back to one cream bitch who kept a black nose until the age of 5, at which time it started to fade gradually. Presently, 5 of our creams still have black noses, while those of the others are close to black in the summer but fade in the winter, a well known problem they share with some reds. To maintain black noses in the winter requires these dogs to be continuously exposed to full spectrum grow lights, a method quite familiar to Lhasa breeders. I am convinced that a strain of white creams with consistently black noses can be developed by clever breeding of large numbers, and limiting breeding to those specimen with the best pigmentation. However, I am equally convinced that we should be able to regain the strong pigmentation of the original imports if these same methods were applied to all other color varieties as well. This is exceedingly important because it is part of what sets our breed apart from most others. With other words, it is essential, if we want to maintain its essence.

Most discoveries have historically been accidental, followed by research to explain the unexpected. Even Mendel's Law was arrived at as a result of experimentation. I have taken note of the many opinions about the pigmentation of the Creams, but never participated in the discussions because, even though I have probably more experience than most with this variety, my opinions are mainly based on years of experimentation.

I have no definitive formula to offer which, in engineering terms, means that if you are unable to reduce a theory into a simple equation which, when applied, results in a consistently predictable outcome, that opinion is no more than a hypothesis.

Predictably, such explanations of color

inheritance as published by Clarence Little in 1957 and more recently by Janneke Leunissen, are most interesting even when not always totally accurate, but like Mendel's Law they fail to be of much practical use.

The problem I have is that, so far, many opinions or theories presented, both sympathetic and adversarial, have been advocated by people with little or no experimental data to substantiate their claims. As with the smooths, most opponents in particular, have no experience at all and sometimes even claim never to have had smooths or creams in the pedigrees of their dogs. Both claims are incorrect as it can easily be proven that all Chows in the Western World carry both the smooth and cream factors in their genetic finger prints, and any of these factors can be intensified by selective inbreeding.

I'd like to emphasize that inbreeding *does not* create anything new, but only intensifies certain characteristics, both good and bad. It requires a thorough and objective knowledge of the desirable and undesirable characteristics of preferably all, or at least most of the ancestors in the pedigrees of the dogs to be mated. It is here where the large kennels have an advantage, particularly when they stay in their own bloodline. Most breeders are not very forthcoming in revealing the problems in their stock, so most small kennels thrash around in the dark just guessing to which ancestor(s) a particular problem should be traced. It is the very reason why so many outstanding dogs today have such open pedigrees, as their breeders correctly assumed that by mixing up the genetic pool, the unwanted characteristics could be suppressed. However, no consistent quality can be expected either, as the outstanding specimen are unable to put their stamp on their offspring. With the disappearance of the large kennels who created their own consistent type, it is now much more difficult to produce a consistently high quality bloodline. Inbreeding or line breeding, which is inbreeding at a distance, with many of today's dogs with open pedigrees, has become unattractive because of the increased likelihood of unpleasant surprises. But inbreeding can be a valuable tool when applied properly. When I have a male which consistently produces outstanding litters, pretty well regardless of which bitches he is bred to, I will invariably breed him back to a daughter that resembles him in many ways.

This is done to identify any serious flaw in his genetic fingerprint and avoid blindly doubling up on that flaw in future generations. As the outcome can prove to be a disaster, this type of experimentation can be costly, but in a large kennel it is an insurance for the continued welfare of the bloodline.

The other useful application of inbreeding is to try to reestablish a characteristic or variety which has become so rare that good specimen are simply not readily available. A case in point is that the first smooth we ever bred, out of a litter with 4 roughs, did not have a single smooth ancestor for 7 generations, but had the smooth bitch "Ukwong Velvet" showing up twice in the 8th generation. Velvet, herself, was the result of a rough to smooth cross, as Eric Egerton always kept only one smooth bitch in his kennel.

Around 1900, smooth Chows were imported occasionally, but were not often bred. However, in the twenties, Mrs. Harry Rawson, Miss Ella Casella and Mrs. E.M. Jones bred some excellent specimen. Miss Casella obtained her smooth male, Lun Tai, in 1896 from a Chinese Mandarin. He was the choice from some 100 puppies, competed with Chow VIII and was considered the best available specimen of his country of origin. We can furthermore identify at least 25 other smooths in the pedigrees of the early Chows, so that any assertion that the smooth variety is not part of our breed and did not contribute to the chow as we know him today, is seriously misguided. The deletion of all references to the smooth in the 1941 standard revision was therefore ill advised and insidious, as it suggested that the subsequent appearance of any smooths in a litter was proof of impure breeding. No doubt many of these unfortunate smooth puppies must have been quietly discarded, convincing some of our present old-timers that the breed in North America was devoid of any smooth genes.

With the original Chinese imports and their immediate offspring, it was not uncommon to have litters with all the recognized colors represented, which today is very rare indeed. The only time this happened in our kennel was when we bred a black male to his very light red daughter, whose dam was a litter sister to the black male's grandmother. The litter of 4 consisted of 1 black, 1 dark red, 1 blue and 1 fawn. Interestingly,

of the many hundreds of puppies we produced over the years, that was one of only two fawns we ever bred. As I have never been partial to this variety, it proves that one should never be too concerned about being overwhelmed with any unwanted color(s) as long as you systematically exclude them from your breeding program. As much as one can breed up certain characteristics, one can breed them down as well.

In the early days in England, whole red was considered to be the one normal and typical color. But chows never came in vogue until cream shadings were admitted, and black, blues, fawns and creams were added to the monotonous reds. In fact, the interest in the breed was prompted, to a large extent, by the interesting dissimilarities in coloring which afforded a wider latitude for individual preferences. However, I would estimate that 90% of all chows today are of the red variety, with 7% for blacks and only 3% for the rest of all dilutes combined.

I believe the main reason for this is that it is far easier to achieve show successes with reds than with any of the other colors. Exhibitors, therefore, have a marked preference for this color and, although they represent only a fraction of 1% of the total Chow fancy, exhibitors do determine the future of our breed, in part, through their control of the Standard. This does not have to be a bad thing, provided that fundamental changes to the intent and spirit of the original document of the country of origin (England) are avoided. With other words, if there is to be any continuity of effort toward the creation of a breed type as distinct from any others, it must be predicated upon an all but unchanging written Standard of Perfection, rather than upon an often changing Standard which attempts to accommodate the fashion of the moment, or the dog(s) with the greatest winning record.

The red variety will always be the most popular because they are the easiest to produce and, as a result of their overwhelming majority, offer the greatest number of excellent specimen to choose from. They are also afforded the greatest latitude in coat color. We see whole colored dark reds, self reds with lighter shadings, whole colored light reds coming close to a cream color and finally the dark red saddled ones with pure white fronts, breeches, tails and socks.

Regretfully, we also notice that presently up to 50% black in the coats of the reds has apparently become acceptable as well. Realistically, we can hardly continue to insist on such terms as "clear colored" or "solid" in our Standard, when some of these dogs would be more accurately described as parti-colored. On the other hand, no such latitude is afforded any of the other 4 recognized colors. Can one just imagine a pure white dog with a black saddle and some biscuit shadings being designated a black, like the white shaded red being accepted as belonging to the red variety? Therefore, the suggestion that the cream variety should first be more precisely identified as distinct from a light red with poor pigmentation before it can be afforded the same level playing field offered automatically to the vast majority of reds and blacks, is not only ambiguous, but fundamentally dishonest.

The reason we have such a problem with color purity today is that crossbreeding between all the color varieties has been practiced without recognition of, or concern for, the possible consequences. Back in the early twenties, breeders already cautioned that one cannot intensify blackness by the admixture of any other color, and where color alone is the consideration, it is better to keep the blacks distinct. They further suggested that the objectionable light eyes so frequent among black chows are due to crossing with reds. Indeed, one of the 5 original English imports from China, which have developed historically into the foundation breeding stock of the entire Western World, was Mr. Burgess' Ch Singapore Boy, who was described as a very light shaded red, tall and flashy, but with a light eye. They go on, warning that black puppies from a red to black cross are not improved by the redness of the red parent and that their mature coat is liable to have a slightly rusty tinge, instead of the raven black which is too seldom seen. Similarly, when mating a blue to a black, the desired blue tint is apt to become too dark and when the rare, true blue has once been secured, it is not well to make experiments by crossing with either black or red. I couldn't agree more. The irony of it all is that, in our experience, the rare, very white cream with excellent pigmentation offers the best hope to recover color purity in all the other color varieties.

We discovered that the best white creams,

with the best pigmentation, were obtained by crosses with blacks. I sometimes refer to them as "hidden blacks". No doubt, the black contributed significantly to their strong pigmentation. The one drawback to this type of cream is that when crossed with any other color, including black, a large percentage of the resulting puppies will be black, but the color purity will be improved, sometimes dramatically. However, with the overwhelming preference for reds, that outcome may constitute an economic obstacle. On the other hand, we have found the worldwide demand for our white creams incredible. Outside North America allowances are made for the nose color of the creams, even though darker noses, especially black ones, are still preferred, people are more swayed by overall quality, and correctly so. The luster and rarity of the color combined with excellent pigmentation are just an added attraction. As overall quality and balance have always been our main objective, it follows that cream has never taken precedence over any of the other characteristics including color. I detest a poor cream as much as a poor specimen of any other color and fully sympathize with those who equate the cream variety with the light red specimen with poor pigmentation, and often inferior overall quality, they are used to. But then, when we came to Canada in 1958, the common wisdom at the time seemed to be that blacks were inherently inferior to reds, an assumption we could quickly dispense with when pictures of our Commander Black were published.

In addition to the disproportionate latitude in color, the reds have the additional advantage that bleaching from exposure to the sun or from dead hair is unnoticeable, and a lighter eye is far less obvious than in a black or blue. Therefore, it is clear that they have the same, or possibly worse, pigmentation problems than the other color varieties but can hide them better. This is similar to the rough versus smooth controversy, as I like to point out to the critics of smooths that most of them are the result of crosses with roughs and that they, therefore, should hate the conformation of their own roughs when they are denied the disguise of their long coat.

Also, in our experience, we have had far more frequent incidents with inferior pigmentation of eyes, nose, gums or areas below the tongue with our reds, than with

our blacks or blues. Simply put, prejudice is no substitute for realism.

My interest in creams was initially prompted by the total absence of true blues, let alone true blues of outstanding overall quality. I was repeatedly warned by old-times I respected, that color breeding for the sake of achieving color purity in addition to overall quality was so difficult to achieve that few people, if any, have ever been successful with it. This is especially true for the light blues, as it probably is the most delicate color to work with. The eight blues we produced, even though lovely as puppies, were bred from black and were dark enough to predict an off-black mature coat, and all of them were subsequently sold. To aim no higher than repeating past successes with reds and blacks seemed as boring to me as having the same dish for supper with little variation except for different dressings.

I assumed that the only way to come up with a true blue was by first acquiring, or breeding for a line of white creams of a quality and type similar to my reds and blacks. Since they simply did not exist, I had to go through a lot of experimentation, disappointment and surprises, using Canadian, American and English creams in the process, before coming up with the type of dog I was aiming for. We only showed three of our creams, as I was not abandoning my reds and blacks, but all three gained their titles with incredible ease. Clark gained his title in both Canada and the U.S. and won the Champions Class at the World Show in Helsinki. He has the greatest winning record of any Chow puppy, of any color, in Canada...ever. Although shown now only one weekend per year, he managed to stay undefeated while winning four consecutive Specialties under American and English Breed experts, as well as under a Finnish Judge. In addition, I just finished the Canadian title on a black son of Clark's with 2 Group 1st, 1 Group 2nd, 2 Best

Puppies in Group and 1 Best Puppy in Show in one weekend, under 4 different judges at the ripe old age of 6 1/2 months. All this proves is that, in the words of Dr. Imogene Earl of Pandee fame, "a good dog is so, regardless of his color."

My satisfaction lies, not just in the eventual success over adversity and prejudice, but more in the unexpected surprises and the ongoing process of better understanding the mysteries of breeding Chows. It is a private matter, which does not need the approval of anyone, and I totally understand that the majority of the fanciers prefer to stay with the two color varieties they are most comfortable with. But please let us not toss our breed's history aside as unimportant, by subordinating any of the colors that have been part of the original description or essence of our breed to sanction the prejudice of a few. The 1941 Standard change which acknowledged the legitimacy of the cream color on the one hand, but made sure it could not compete by stipulating a nose other than black to be a disqualifying fault, is a not-so-subtle attempt to reduce their numbers and discourage their use in any breeding program. The justification was the assumption, unsupported by evidence either empirically or scientifically, that the use of creams would inescapably lead to a loss of pigment in all Chows. Apparently a pink or dudley nose was proof of that. My experience has taught me that any "hidden black" creams do just the opposite. The ambiguity of that decision becomes even more obvious by the Club's decision to afford the blue variety, which is and was more black than blue, the latitude of having a slate colored nose.

I appreciate that color breeding is not everybody's cup of tea, but if the American fancy insists on a Standard which is at variance with the Standard accepted by the rest of the World, the solution would logically be the creation of an "American Chow Chow" breed, as distinct from the "English Chow

Chow." Such a decision would undoubtedly eventually lead to two breeds as dissimilar as the American Cocker Spaniel is from the English Cocker Spaniel. Obviously our breed would be the loser and hopefully we can agree to disagree by removing those controversial sections of the Standard which tend to divide us.

As I have said before, all of our chows, yours and mine, carry the cream dilute factor, which will surprise many of you, when a cream shows up in one of your litters, apparently out of nowhere. Normally this occurs as the result of inbreeding when the cream factor comes from both sides. There are many examples, but I limited myself to two of them to illustrate the point.

The first case is that of the cream male Tamarin Polaris, which was one of the creams on which I founded my cream line. He was the product of an accidental litter brother to sister mating. The curious part was that all ancestors in his first three generations were black, with the exception of one cinnamon in the third generation. Being a West Coast dog, my first suspicion was that the cream factor came from Poppyland Choo Choo, but she had nothing to do with it. Going back 8 generations, I identified none other than the black, English bred male "Ch. Alexis of Adel," who was purchased by Henk and Kitty van de Wouw in 1967, together with the red male "Andrew of Adel", shortly after Miss Buckley died. When I visited Miss Buckley's Adel Kennel in 1966, at least 30% of her stock was made up of creams, and Alexis did produce creams himself. I made up a little diagram, connecting some of the better known American dogs to show you that they, and their offspring, all carry the cream factor and that by doubling up, you might be surprised by an unexpected cream puppy, as was the case with Polaris. ■