

Consider this

Splitting the Breed By Mary Wiest

As seen in the Summer 2002 – Labrador Quarterly

Well, this has been an interesting topic. There are a few things I have to clear up from my last column. I DIDN'T think and do not think that the breed should be split three ways. The English type dog, the American type dog and the field trial type dog. I put forth these definitions of these different types because there are, in my opinion, three types of dogs in this country. I should have been more clear. It was very clear in my own head.

Nevertheless, the split I see is with the dogs that were disenfranchised because of the change in the standard and those who were not; or the English type dog becomes its own breed while the American and field trial dogs remain as one breed. The owners of the American type dog and the field trial type dogs are both happy with the standard, the owners of the English type dogs are not happy at all.

It is time to stop fighting about the standard, it is official, it will not be changed, it is here to stay. We all want our dogs and we are all entitled to our dogs. It is time for each of us to go our own way at least as far as the standard goes.

In my last column, I brought up the problem with the gene pool becoming smaller for each type if the breed was split. I think the majority of us stay within the gene pool within each type and will not see any major change. Very few people do breeding between the three types. The people who do, are the people who will have the most problem with the splitting of the breed.

What do some of you think? First, I would like to thank all of you who responded to my column. Your responses were interesting and thought provoking. I will share some of these responses with all of you.

I received one letter, "concerned about how I described the different types. She didn't like my adjectives. Well, it is my column and words, I used the words that I felt best described the dogs. Sorry, you did not agree with adjectives.

Many of you were concerned about the process of splitting the breed. Well so am I. So, before the next deadline for this magazine I will find out from the AKC. One thing all can count on, it will be up to each owner, each breeder which breed his/her dog becomes.

An email I received was very interesting. She was for the splitting of the breed. She felt that if we educated the public to the basic differences of the types that less of our dogs would end up, if they were lucky, in Labrador rescue. This is a very good point. The personalities and the activity level are so different between the types that educating the public would really help in getting the right type dog in the right home. Good point!

Another email I received is from a lady who lives in the Midwest. She was very upset that I said the American dog developed in the Midwest. She felt I was really saying that the only dogs they have in the Midwest are the American type dog. This is not what I said nor what I meant. All three types can be found in any part of this country.

There has been a lot of name calling and people losing their tempers. This gets everyone no place. THIS IS NOT A FIGHT! This is a group of people who feel their dogs are not described correctly in the standard, wishing to make their own breed. This doesn't hurt anyone, it doesn't pit any group against any other group.

This is also not about what happened with the standard being changed. That is old news and it is done. Period. We have to accept what is now and make a decision if we want to change it. When I go to the AKC about splitting the breed, I am not going to ask can we? I am not going to talk about the Labrador history. I am going to ask what process is needed for the AKC to grant the people who feel they and their dogs were disenfranchised by the adoption of the Labrador Retriever standard to become another breed.

I am sick and tired of the fighting. Our dogs are *too* fat. Theirs are too tall. Our dogs have *too* short of muzzle, theirs are plane faced. On and on it goes. I am tired of it. None of us have to explain why we want our dogs as we do. It is enough that we want different dogs. I will not fight about this. If you don't want a split in the breed, that is your business; I do. I am willing to stand up and do the work to make it happen.

Some other comments made to me. The judges will have an easier time of it. Well, that is true. Another person felt that we would lose function and structure by splitting the breed, the function being working ability. Well, this is just not so. The English type dog works very well. He has proven he can work in the Hunting Test. Look at the list of sires who have produced champion dogs who are Master Hunters. I know of at least two that are very English type bred (I bred both). We all know the American and field trial dogs can work. Structure; well that is an interesting one, for the

English dog has a different structure than the American type dog. Both being right for the type of dog they are. For example, the English type dog's ribs come off the spine straight out to the sides, then, after about two inches, start falling off to make the rib cage. The American type dog's ribs start falling off as soon as they leave the spine.

Another comment I received and I quote, "... the pressure we keep on one another has an extremely valuable side effect. It slows down the drift toward caricature that I have personally observed in other purebred animals." Isn't this what the judge are supposed to do?

Another email I receive was from a breeder who state she gets both types of Labrador in one litter. What will she do if the breed is split? I don't know I have never seen a litter that had both types of dogs. She will have a problem.

Another email was from breeder who felt the standard we have right now is just fine. She has, in her opinion, English type dogs who win at specialties and at all breed shows. She feels the people who wish to split the breed are the people who have the exaggerated type of dogs. Well, I really have to disagree with this. I will use my dogs an example. I feel my dogs are very typical of the breed. They have competed in different parts of the world and have been successful. They "fit in" with dogs found around the world. They have also been successfully used in field work and obedience There is nothing exaggerated about them and I VERY much want to split the breed.

Most of the people who were against the splitting of breed, their reason was one dog is a Labrador period. I really don't understand this thinking. Is the Cocker Spaniel any less of a Spaniel because the breed has been split. Did either breed lose because of the split? Did their working ability change because the breed was split. NO, NO, NO, the different type dogs were allowed to be "correct" in AKC and judges' eyes. The Labrador types should be allowed to be "correct" in AKC and judges' eyes.

I am truly tired of the fighting. I am tired of an old man remembering events the way he wants them to have happened and, no less, printing his remembrances. Of columns with so much untruth in them, you can only shake your head. I am tired of the hate. I am tired! But believe this, I will fight for my breed, for my dogs. I will fight until the battle is won.

I didn't get one note that stated a reason for the breeds not to be split that I felt was so compelling that it changed my mind about going forward with this effort. If you have one, now is the time to state it. I would hate to go through all the effort I know this is going to be and then find out a perfectly good reason why it shouldn't be done.

Some final things. At the same time I brought up splitting the breed, The Labrador Retriever Club of the Potomac is trying to organize a Breed Council similar to the Council in England. This has NOTHING to do with MY effort. Also, Price Jessup is organizing a new national club, again this has nothing to do with me or my effort. As President of the National Labrador Retriever Club, I want to make it very clear that my efforts have nothing to do with this club. The NLRC has always been a non-political club that works to support and protect the dog described in the FCI standard. This is a personal effort. Please take a look at the English Fox Hound and the American Fox Hound and tell me if they are any more alike than the English type Labrador and the American type Labrador.

The majority of responses I have received are from people who are ready and willing to split the breed. They think it will be best for each type of dog and the people who love them. I agree!

From one breeder to another.