Golden Retriever – Health Issues

The Golden Retriever is usually a healthy, lively and loving dog. The normal life span is 12-13 years. A caring and conscientious breeder will have only bred from sound, healthy parents and will have taken all steps necessary to ensure their puppies are free from any hereditary or temperament defects. Some of the health issues which will have considered are:

HIP DYSPLASIA

The Kennel Club and the British Veterinary Association run a joint hip scoring scheme for all breeds. Most Golden Retriever breeders (and certainly all Accredited Breeders) subscribe to this scheme and have their breeding bitches and stud dogs hip scored. Scoring cannot be done until the dog or bitch is at least 12 months of age. The usual procedure is for the breeders’ vet to take x-rays of the hips and send the plates to the BVA for scoring. A panel of at least two specialists examine the x-ray plates and score each hip. Several different areas of the hip joint are measured and given a score. The higher the score, the more dysplasia there is. Each hip can carry a maximum score of 53. Thus the lowest score (and a perfect hip joint) is 0-0 = total of 0 and the highest score is 53-53 = total of 106 (total hip dysplasia) The breed average for the Golden Retriever is a total of 20.

Most breeders only breed from bitches of breed average (20) or below and from stud dogs who are considerably lower. Hip scoring the parents cannot guarantee the puppies will all be free of hip dysplasia as other environmental issues such as feeding, exercise and housing can influence the development of the growing hip. Genetic hereditability is thought to only be around 22%. Copies of hip scores for both parents should be available for any puppy purchaser to see (and hopefully to keep)

Details of the hip score is recorded and published by the Kennel Club in the Breed Records Supplement. It is printed on the Kennel Club Registration document.

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ELBOW DYSPLASIA

Elbow Dysplasia is thought to be a genetic hereditary condition which, like hips, is influenced by rearing, feeding and exercise. Elbow dysplasia leads to osteoarthritis and is a crippling condition. The Kennel Club and British Veterinary Association run an elbow scoring system similar to the hip scheme, and breeding dogs and bitches can be x-rayed at one year of age. The plates are sent to the BVA and each elbow is scored from 0 -3 but unlike the hips, the score is NOT added together. The elbow score is taken from the highest scoring elbow. This means, 0-0 =0; 0-3=3 but also 3-3= 3. The advice offered by the BVA/KC is for breeders not to breed from a score of 2 or 3. Some breeders are unconvinced that the elbow KC/BVA is as comprehensive as the hip scheme and therefore not all subscribe to it. Again, the results are recorded and printed in the Kennel Club’s Breed Record Supplement.

EYE CONDITIONS

There are several eye conditions that conscientious Golden Retriever breeders screen yearly for. The screening must be done by qualified, eye specialists. Screening can be done by the BVA/KC eye panellists or by the Animal Health Trust eye specialists. Certificates issued are either KC/BVA or European certificates. The eye conditions currently accepted as affecting Golden Retrievers are HC (Hereditary Cataract), PRA (Progressive Retinal Atrophy), and MRD (Multi focal Retinal Dysplasia). The eye conditions are very complex, and the mode of inheritance unknown. The Animal Health Trust are currently spear heading several projects, including developing DNA diagnostic tests for certain eye conditions. Further information can be found on their web site of www.aht.org.uk

Most breeders only breed from dogs and bitches with current clear eye certificates.

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