

WHAT IS A PEDIGREE?

by Pat Santi

A pedigree is a record of your dog's ancestors. Every creature, animal, plant or human has a pedigree. Unless someone has taken the time to write it down and keep track of it, the information is usually lost in the mists of time and memory. The record shows, sire (father), dam (mother), grandsire, granddam and great grandsire and dams and so forth.

The American Kennel Club and other dog registries are designed to keep track of pedigrees. You can obtain them for a fee on frameable paper. The AKC registration certificate you receive means your dog's information is kept on file in their records.

The American Kennel Club keeps records on your dog's name, color, sex, parentage, date of birth, breeder and any titles that your dog may win or has won. The AKC also records such things as OFA and CERF and DNA numbers on all animals so tested. The OFA and Cerf mean your dog is free of hip and eye disease.

When applying for registration, the AKC relies on breeders and owners to be honest. Today we have the use of DNA records to help identify dogs.

What a pedigree does not tell you is very important. Any purebred dog that meets AKC's requirements for registration may be registered and receive papers. The papers can't tell you if the dog is of good quality or if it even looks like the breed it is supposed to be. All it can tell you is that the dog is registered and his records are kept on file. Many people misunderstand this very important point. Many poor quality dogs are registered and you can't judge a dog's quality by looking at the registration papers or the pedigree unless you know the ancestors of the dog and their qualities.

Now, you know that the pedigree can only tell you the dog's ancestors, you must look to find what they were like and what health issues they had. What can your dog inherit and what about temperament problems that can be passed on to their descendants.

If your dog is just a pet, you may not care about his or her background. If you intend to show and breed, however, getting accurate information about his or her background is much more important and crucial. You will need to know more than just the names on the pedigree.

To find out more about the dogs in your pedigree, you should visit your dog's breeder to see the sire and dam firsthand. The breeder should be able to tell you where to find

your dog's grandparents as well. The information on dogs farther back may have to come from books on your breed. Pictures only tell you a part of the story and so do ribbons and trophies. You need to talk with the older breeders to see what they know of firsthand knowledge of the older dogs.

You ask what does the "Ch" mean in front of a dog's name? "Ch" is an abbreviation for Champion. A title that makes most people's heart beat a little faster. A pedigree filled with champions, their titles written in red ink, is an impressive sight indeed.

A championship means that this dog had to compete with other dogs and win the required number of points to gain this title. It can be easier to become a champion in some breeds than in others.

Is a champion a dog of exceptional quality? Sometimes yes it is, and sometimes no it is not. A champion is only as good as the competition it had to beat. In some areas competition is poor or people show littermates and win off each other. In areas where competition is poor, a champion may be just slightly above average for his breed. He may not be able to achieve this title in places where competition is tougher. Having the title does not tell you whether he actually deserved it.

A championship cannot tell you that the dog is good breeding stock or if he or she has inherited defects that can be passed on to his or her puppies. Only firsthand knowledge from the people who actually knew the dogs can tell you that.

So, a pedigree is a tool to help breeders produce better dogs. It is a starting point for research. A pedigree by itself means nothing much without knowing what the dogs in the pedigree were really like; a pedigree is just an impressive list to start with to gain knowledge of your dog's background.