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Producing quality puppies is often the result of our “why” in breeding.

performance events needs to have the correct structure to do so, and cosmetic faults have no bearing on performance. A conformation prospect needs to have correct structure. A Pembroke puppy can go through so many changes before he or she is fully mature. Some things change; others do not.

We had a wide-ranging educational conversation about many things related to structure, stages of development, and goals. I shared some of my whys and experiences.

We finally got to her why. Why did she buy this puppy, and what were her long-

range plans for it? Once I understood her why, I was then ready to look at the pup. It proved to be a very good discussion.

Driving home, I thought more about the why of it all. *Why* can be applied to so many things. Why did you select that instructor? Why do you choose one show over another? Why do you choose to participate in some events but not others? Why did you lose your enthusiasm? Why do you volunteer for club activities? Why did you select that stud dog? Why did you decide to stop showing and breeding? Why did you get that first

Pembroke? Why does the breed standard say what it says? Why does it matter if a Pembroke is too tall or too heavy-boned? Why are so many Pembrokes being bred, but so few are showing up in the conformation rings and performance venues?

Asking the “why” of something applies to things outside of dog activities as well. Your why might be a goal or a purpose, or it just may make you think about things for a while longer and a bit deeper.

Why ask why? There are no right or wrong answers, but the introspection that results may well be worth it.

Why do you ask?
—Lynda McKee,
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Pulik

I’m pleased to welcome guest contributors Brian Brubaker and Alece Coulman, experienced Puli breeder-owner-handlers, to share their insights on DNA

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testing. Congratulations to Brian and Alece on their success at the 2025 Puli national specialty, held this past September in California, where their breeding won Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex! In this article, they discuss how DNA testing supports responsible breeding and contributes to a successful program.

PULIK: DOG DNA DEMYSTIFIED

When marketers consider bringing a new product or service to market, they often talk about the product attributes. Some are *nice-to-have* and may persuade consumers to buy, while others are non-negotiable *must-haves*. For example, if you were shopping for a car, cupholders might be nice, but some form of propulsion—whether a combustion engine or an electric battery—is essential. We can think about DNA testing in a similar way. For breeders and pet owners, some tests are nice-to-have, while in certain circumstances they

are truly must-have.

There's no question that information embedded in our best friend's DNA can be a valuable resource, even if only to satisfy curiosity. Canine DNA testing emerged in the late 2000s, following the completion of the Human Genome Project. Establishing a genetic sequence for canines was pursued for many reasons and was first marketed as a method for determining the breed or breeds in a dog's lineage.

As technology improved, the cost of canine DNA analysis dropped, and the range of information to be gleaned from these tests expanded considerably.

Today, DNA testing can not only reveal ancestry beyond breed makeup but also identify numerous genetic factors that may put a dog at risk, including conditions such as degenerative myelopathy (DM) or dilated cardiomyopathy. For a Puli to be issued a Canine Health Information Center (CHIC) number, DNA testing for

DM is required.

While CHIC certification does not require all results to be normal, the results must be publicly accessible so responsible breeders can make informed breeding decisions. For potential puppy buyers, CHIC certification is a helpful indicator that the breeder is factoring health responsibly into their selection process.

Given the wide availability of genetic information available, much of the information gleaned from a DNA test is *nice-to-have*. For breeders, many kits offer breed-specific insights into a dog's genetic predisposition to certain traits or hereditary diseases. While not the sole basis for a breeding decision, this data can be one useful factor to consider. Many DNA test kits may also provide health screenings, coefficient of inbreeding (COI), and traits such as size or coat color.

However, while tests for Puli coat color can be interesting, it's important to remember that responsible

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Top and left: Puli puppy and a teenage Puli, with coat beginning transition (photos courtesy Alece Coulman, Spindrift Pulik); Top right, the final adult version of the coat (charcoal, artist Sarah Coleman).

breeding decisions should never be driven by a desire for a particular color at the expense of health, temperament, or breed type. If both potential breeding animals are in the database, some

tests include a pair predictor tool, which gives probabilities for inherited genetic traits (e.g., DM).

Testing services may also flag breed-specific concerns. For Pulik, this includes conditions such as primary lens luxation (PLL), a hereditary eye disorder in dogs in which the lens of the eye becomes displaced from its normal position. For other breeds, and dependent upon

DNA test features, analyses might include coat color, hind dewclaws, and predicted adult weight.

Ultimately, while optional, these tests can offer breeders and pet owners valuable insight into potential health risks their dog may face as well as possible genetic outcomes from a planned breeding. For owners of “all-American dogs” (i.e., mixed breeds), these tests

PHOTOS COURTESY ALECE COULMAN, SPINDRIFT PULIK / CHARCOAL, SARAH COLEMAN



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provide a glimpse into the breed ancestry behind their companion.

That said, DNA results should be viewed in context. Breed ancestry depends on the company's database, so accuracy varies. Health markers also indicate *risk*, not certainty—a positive result does not guarantee disease, and a negative result does not mean a dog is risk-free. For this reason, results are best used as one tool among many.

Veterinary input is important for interpreting findings, and breeders should pair DNA results with health clearances, exams, and breed-club guidance. Different companies also emphasize different features—ancestry, health, or both—so databases and privacy policies may vary.

Of great importance for fanciers is understanding the must-have scenarios where DNA testing is required. The AKC requires DNA profiling several situations, including when using a foreign-born dog for breeding;

for any dog whose semen is collected for fresh-extended or frozen use; and for the sire, dam, and all puppies of a multi-sire litter. The AKC also requires DNA profiling for “Frequently Used Sires,” defined as any dog who has sired seven or more litters in its lifetime, or three or more litters within a single calendar year. In all these cases, the DNA test is a simple cheek-swab. It takes very little time to complete, can be mailed in, and typically costs between \$100 and \$200.

When choosing a DNA test, consider the company's database size, focus (ancestry vs. health), breed coverage, and privacy policies. For breeders, testing puppies early can help inform future breeding decisions, while adult dogs may benefit from health screening updates. DNA results are most useful when paired with veterinary guidance and regular health monitoring.

Remember, a positive genetic risk doesn't guarantee disease, but it can help you take proactive steps to sup-

port your dog's long-term well-being. —B.B. and A.C.

For further reading:

[Emilie Le Beau Lucchesi](#). 2022. The science behind dog DNA tests. <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-science-behind-dog-dna-tests-43362>

Erin Latham Shea. 2024. Canine DNA testing: what you need to know. (<https://rochsociety.com/canine-dna-testing/>)

DNA and the AKC: <https://www.akc.org/breeder-programs/dna/#:~:text=The%20AKC%20DNA%20Database%20and,parentage%20at%20the%20breeder's%20expense>

—Dagmar Fertl,
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[Puli Club of America](#)

Shetland Sheepdogs

JUDGE SELECTION

Whether you are a judges selection committee chairman or a member giving your input on judges to hire, there are many issues to consider.

One of the first things