



BMDCA Info Series

Sources of Health Information for BMDs

2009 #16

Introduction ► A critical aspect of becoming an informed buyer of any purebred dog is acquiring, understanding and actively using the broad array of valuable health information that is available about a puppy's ancestry. This is especially true for the Bernese Mountain Dog. In addition to the knowledge that can be gleaned from an AKC Certified Pedigree and through the Canine Health Information Center ("CHIC"), there is also the potential to "mine" more facts from the unique, open database maintained by Berner-Garde, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to accumulating and disseminating health information about BMDs. While there are no absolute guarantees, knowledge and research can greatly improve the probability of an informed buyer acquiring a healthy, long-lived puppy from a responsible breeder.



Both are darling, but are they equally well-bred?

To maximize what you can learn from this *BMDCA Info Sheet*, it is recommended that you go to each referenced organization's website as it is discussed so that you can obtain additional information and instruction while you are thinking about the subject matter and experience the value of this outstanding health information resource first-hand.

What is CHIC? ► <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/chicinfo.html>

The Canine Health Information Center, also known as CHIC, is a centralized canine health database jointly sponsored by the AKC/Canine Health Foundation (AKC/CHF) and the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA – <http://www.offa.org/>). Its goals are to:

- "Work with parent clubs in the identification of health issues for which a central information system should be established.
- "Establish and maintain a central health information system in a manner that will support research into canine disease

and provide health information to owners and breeders.

- "Establish scientifically valid diagnostic criteria for the acceptance of information into the database.
- "Base the availability of information on individually identified dogs at the consent of the owner."

"Core to the CHIC philosophy is the realization that each breed has different health concerns." With input from the BMDCA (the breed's parent club), CHIC and the Club tailored the CHIC requirements to the needs of the Bernese Mountain Dog. "A CHIC number is issued when test results are entered into the database satisfying each breed-specific requirement, and when the owner of the dog has opted to release the results into the public domain. The CHIC number itself does not imply normal test results, only that all the required breed specific tests were performed and the results made publicly available."

By clicking on the link below you will be connected to the BMD Breed Requirement Page that lists the BMD-specific health-test requirements and provides more links to highly informative educational material. There is also a search function through which you can view the AKC-registered names of BMDs that have received CHIC numbers.

<http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/brdreqs.html?breed=BMD>

For Bernese, CHIC health-test data tracks AKC DNA profile, von Willebrand's Disease, Hip Dysplasia, Elbow Dysplasia, Eye Clearance and Congenital Heart Disease. CHIC testing is not about normalcy. It is about whether the tests were completed with the long-term goal of reducing genetic diseases and improving canine and BMD health.

What health information is contained in the AKC Pedigrees & Certificates? ► <http://www.akc.org/>

The **AKC Certified Pedigree** is a document that lists the selected dog's ancestry for three or four generations. It includes a wealth of information for each dog listed, if one knows how to decode the data provided!

To assist you in the decoding process, the AKC website provides an illustrated sample of an AKC Certified Pedigree (link provided below). Accessed through navigation tools, the reader is provided with very helpful explanations of the standard notations on the pedigree.

<http://www.akc.org/reg/AKCpedigree.cfm>

For each dog contained in the AKC Certified Pedigree the following information is provided (assuming that the information exists): registration number, registered name, coat colors, Stud Book dates, OFA certification and grade for hips, OFA certification and pass/fail for elbows, and CERF (eyes) certification. As stated on the AKC website, "CERF data is only good for 12 months from the date of the exam, and after two

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calendar years, the notation is no longer shown on AKC documents.”

The **AKC Registration Certificate** is another valuable source of information for an AKC-registered dog. Information contained in that document includes the animal's registered name, number, sex, date of birth, breed, sire (with all of the information listed in the pedigree for that specific dog), dam (with all of the information listed in the pedigree for that specific bitch), breeder, and owner. Again, the AKC website offers an easy-to-use, illustrated Registration Certificate (link provided), complete with navigation tools and helpful explanations.

<http://www.akc.org/reg/certificate.cfm>

It should be noted that the AKC issues “Conditional” Pedigrees and Registration Certificates in situations when “unknown parentage is indicated via DNA testing.” The status of the registration will remain downgraded to conditional until a three-generation pedigree is established. “Unknown” will be noted on the registration or pedigree for the ancestor in question. This will only occur in cases where the dogs are believed to be purebred, but a registered parent is found to be incorrect.” The AKC website indicates that these documents will have a different colored border and be clearly labeled.

What is Berner-Garde (“BG”)? ► www.bernergarde.org

“Berner-Garde is a tax-exempt foundation set up to facilitate the orderly acquisition and dissemination of information related to genetic traits in Bernese Mountain Dogs. Its goal is to help breeders reduce genetic disease while breeding for good temperament and type. Berner-Garde is committed to an open database concept where information concerning both affected and unaffected dogs is available to all owners, Bernese Mountain Dog clubs, approved researchers, and other appropriate users. The benefits of this database can be measured in both short- and long-range terms, with an immediate gain for breeders who use the information. In the future, this collection of information will be the basis for studies researching the cause of genetic disease.” “According to various studies, the average lifespan of a Bernese Mountain dog is somewhere between 7 and 8 years. It is the mission of Berner-Garde that all Bernese Mountain Dog owners be able to expect a life span of 12 to 14 years for their dogs. To accomplish this goal, the incidence of several serious hereditary diseases must be decreased. It is the hope of all who know and love a Berner that the work of Berner-Garde will lead to an understanding of genetic disease in the breed.”

To access the Berner-Garde database click this link;

<http://www.bernergarde.org/dbaccess/>

and log on as a guest. You will be amazed at the data you will find at your finger tips! You can conduct searches by people, litters and dogs. You can run reports and queries on health categories/diagnosis by location, kennel name, dogs by title/award, and certifications. You can generate reports by offspring, owner, breeder, stud book and more. Functionality has been built into the database so the user can run "Trial Pedigrees" and evaluate a multi-generation pedigree as if a breeding had taken place between the selected sire and dam.

The BG database is an invaluable resource for the serious, fact-based buyer, as well as for owners, breeders and researchers. Information gathering has been made easy by the robust search engine and ever-growing database. The puppy

buyer can use the data to help form his/her own conclusions about the quality of various breeders and their breeding programs. For example, the buyer would know what breeders are entering data into the Berner-Garde database and who are not. For participating breeders, the buyer can determine what health-clearance testing is being performed or not being performed. And, if the breeder has been inputting longevity and health information about his/her lines over time, the buyer will be able to access that information as well. All of this “mined” data should be combined with insights gained through visits to the breeder's kennel where the buyer can assess his/her rapport and trust level with the breeder. While there, the buyer should evaluate the puppies and parents for both type and temperament. All of these tangible and intangible elements go into the very important decision of whether this is the right breeder and puppy for you.

Concluding Thoughts ► In terms of background research, never before has the saying, “let your fingers do the walking,” had so much applicability! By coupling sound research skills with good interviewing techniques, the informed, savvy buyer should easily connect with the skilled, responsible Berner breeder. And, both should appreciate each other's tenacity and commitment to excellence. While all Berner puppies are cute, sadly not all are “created equal.”

If you are currently looking for a Berner puppy or just beginning to think about whether the Bernese Mountain Dog is the right breed for you, please take advantage of all the wonderful educational tools housed on the BMDCA website such as:

- Other ***BMDCA Info Sheets*** – (not a complete listing)
 - ***Tips on Buying a Bernese Mountain Dog***
 - ***A BMD Puppy's First Year***
 - ***Health Issues in Bernese Mountain Dogs***
 - ***Bernese Mountain Dogs & Grooming/Hygiene***
 - ***FAQs About Bernese Mountain Dogs***
- The **BMDCA Breed Stewards** program, which is a network of BMDCA members who are experienced breeders and owners and have volunteered to make themselves available to talk with you, answer your questions, and assist you in your search for a breeder and a puppy.
- The **BMDCA Online Breeder Referral** program, which is a resource where BMDCA breeders list recently born litters and upcoming litter announcements.
- The **BMD Compatibility Profiler**, which is a multiple-choice questionnaire; based upon your answers, you will be given feedback designed to help you decide whether a Bernese Mountain Dog's temperament, size, costs, care and management needs will match up well with your family's lifestyle.



Look under the hood **before you buy!**

And, ensure that your BMD pup's life-long data is entered in the Berner-Garde database.