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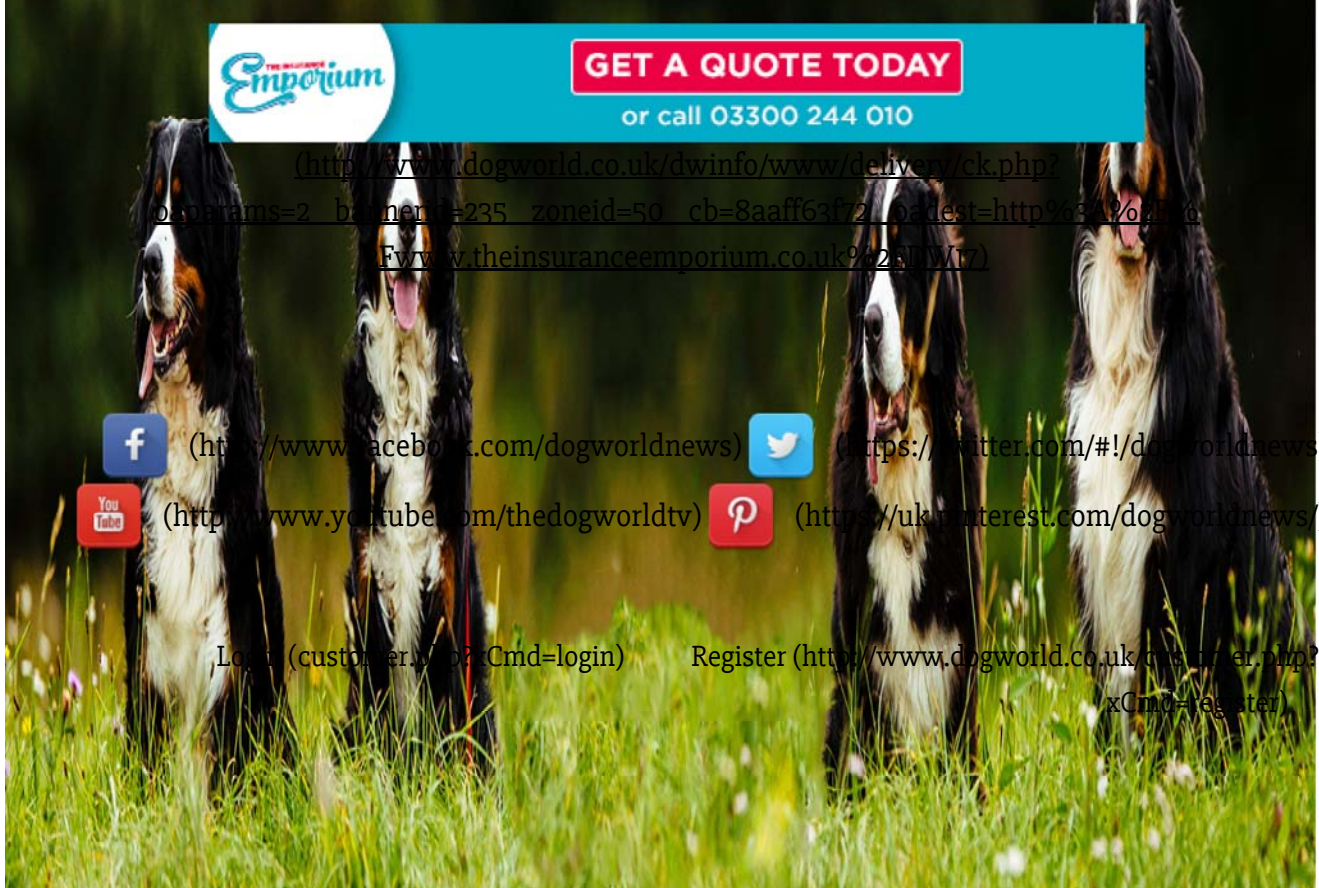
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# Cavaliers let down by guardians of breed, claim campaigners

19/04/2017

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MANY breed club members and top exhibitors are not following breeding guidelines put in place to reduce the incidence of heart disease in the Cavalier, health campaigners say.

Mitral valve disease (MVD) is the biggest killer of Cavaliers, with studies suggesting half will have a heart murmur by six years old, the campaigners say but breed club protocol is being ignored by many.

The MVD breeding protocol, established in the 1990s and part of the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club's code of best practice which members sign up to, states that Cavaliers should not be bred before they are 2.5 years old. But analysis carried out by 'Cavaliers Are Special' shows that 30 per cent of litters bred from top-winning dogs over a five-year period had one or both parents under this age.

"Our study also reveals that non-compliance with heart breeding guidelines was even higher among breeders who were past or present Cavalier Club committee members, office holders or national or regional puppy co-ordinators," said campaigner Charlotte Mackaness.

"Among this group 39 per cent of litters bred had one or both parents under 2.5 years old.

"We examined the winners of three trophies awarded by the Cavalier Club from 2012-'16 inclusive – 114 Cavaliers responsible for 755 litters.

"These are for the Cavalier scoring the most individual points at championship shows, best stud dog and best brood bitch. The latter two categories are based on points scored by their progeny.

"We looked at the five-year period as a whole and also year by year. Non-compliance with the MVD breeding protocol was consistently higher among what was referred to in the study as the 'club committee/puppy co-ordinator group'. The best year for compliance was '15 when overall 27 per cent of litters were bred outside of guidelines. This compares to a high of 34 per cent in '12 and '16."

The highest rate of non-compliance for the club committee/puppy co-ordinator group was 47 per cent in '16, the campaigning group said.

Cavaliers Are Special says the number of litters being bred outside guidelines is 'of serious concern', and the fact non-compliance is even higher among those holding position in the breed club 'a major red flag'. The Cavalier Club's website says puppies should be bought 'from a breeder who health tests their stock, who follows breeding guidelines issued by veterinary experts', Mrs Mackaness said.

"Our figures may well underestimate the problem as we only examined the age of the parents of the litters looked at, not that of the grandparents which according to the MVD protocol should be at least five and heart clear," she said.

"Nor were we able to verify whether any of the Cavaliers held current, clear heart certificates at the time

of mating.”

The Cavalier club has been asked to comment.

KC secretary Caroline Kisko said: “We support the current breeding guidelines in principle and, while we cannot speak for individual breeders’ breeding decisions, we recognise that there are practicalities to be considered when it comes to restricting breeding to a certain age when breeders have concerns about other health problems associated with breeding from older bitches. This is something that is understood by both the KC and the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society and we’re keen that solutions are found through the working group we have set up to review and improve the heart screening of the breed within the UK.

“The KC is dedicated to providing a tool that will assist breeders in producing healthy Cavaliers and most importantly will see a high level of compliance across the board – both from breeders who are involved in the show world and those who are not.”

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**Rod Russell** ·

This statement by the Kennel Club lady, Mrs. Kisko, is very discouraging. It is a giant step backwards. The Cavalier Club has endorsed the wait-to-age-2.5-years breeding protocol since its inception in 1996. That protocol has nearly eliminated early-onset mitral valve disease in future generations of cavaliers when it is followed faithfully. For Mrs. Kisko to demean it so flippantly is inexcusable.

So, we know have confirmation of what we'd (at least, I'd) long assumed -- that the KC is opposed to the MVD breeding protocol. This probably is because the KC associates not breeding until age 2.5 years with reduced litter registrations. As usual, "Follow the Money!"

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**Margaret Carter** · Works at Retired

Do the Kennel Club really consider that Cavaliers age 2.5 years are "older bitches" ?  
The link to the research is published on the Cavaliers Are Special website:

<https://cavaliersarespecial.files.wordpress.com/.../caval...>

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