

Appreciating UNIVERSAL BOXER TYPE

By Michael Todd

Why is it that some breeds have a 'Universal Type' that appears basically the same throughout the world and other breeds, Boxers for instance, are phenotypically different depending on what part of the world in which they are created? For years, I have tried to understand this very challenging concept, as it relates to the Boxer breed I dedicate myself to bettering, and I'm afraid to say that the answer may possibly be the number of people actively breeding Boxers, that seem to have little understanding or interest in learning what makes a good Boxer, per the breed standard in any region worldwide. While there are some minor differences in each region's interpretation of their Boxer standard, the standards are all fundamentally similar in their description of the breed. So why do the Boxers from different parts look so different than what we all see at

local shows? Though it seems rather awkward for a conformation judge to have so much variety in breed type to examine at a large specialty show or national event, and in many cases, you can note such variety in the classes of our American Boxer national specialty, that there appear to be different breeds competing amongst 'our Boxers'.

This original question of Universal Type in Boxers, is what I would like to discuss, as it relates to all Boxer breeders interested in joining efforts to produce dogs of uniform type at a global level, rather than sentimental attachment to show careers and changing the prognosis of the breed, regardless of consistent universal breed likeness. Realizing that the many active breeders have chosen the Boxer as their breed for its different characteristics and for various reasons, I accept that this may be a difficult concept for some and they may find it hard to relate. My early images of Boxers came from the time when I was just learning

about the different characteristics of the many breeds common then; these are images that stay with me throughout my experience as a breeder, though education from a few senior Boxer 'specialists' along the way has aided in a more thorough understanding of those characteristics most crucial to breed type. Other breeders must also work with their own early images as well, but I doubt that any two have the exact same images to draw from as they develop their own proposition of a Boxer. Presumably, those differences in their early breed models, education of breed history and rendering of the ideas projected from the standard, together with sentimentality of the multitude of breeders in the position to make breeding decisions that influence the vision and foresight of the breed, all prove to be a challenge in achieving the end result of Universal Type in Boxers, at present... but it doesn't hurt to share thoughts on the subject.

Just as there are breeds which have experienced dissent among breeders and parent clubs regarding the purity of type in their breed—such as that of the great Japanese Akita/American Akita debate—it could be reasoned that Boxer breeders and parent clubs find similar issue in the future, as the breed image around the world has become less uniform over time. What will constitute an exemplary Boxer in one country, could someday be unaccepted as a Boxer in another country, as their traits become more exaggerated and breeders concern themselves with the fashion and style in their corner of the globe. Sure, this is a hypothetical situation, but not so off the wall when you consider the idea of breeding trends affecting the form and functionality of both individuals within a breed and the breed in general. If you can follow what you've read so far, then you might be



ready to grasp the significance of this proposal of Universal Type.

Soon enough, in the 'Home of the Free', Boxer exhibitors will also likely be faced with the imposition of a ban on ear cropping and tail docking and ultimately in the conformation arena. It shouldn't be so difficult to imagine how Boxers will then be judged using a more cosmopolitan scope of criterion, but then they should also derive the benefit of passing more freely amongst those countries that already experience the grip of such legislation. Considering that all would be made to submit to the crop/dock bans, through legal enforcement as well as kennel club compulsion, the present may well be the best time to train those concerned to the notion of a Universal Boxer. The impression of a cropped/docked Boxer will someday be a thing of the past. If you can imagine Boxers from your breeding program, or even your peer breeder's kennel, competing successfully in Europe, Asia, Australia, South America, etc... then you might be ready for the task at hand. It would certainly not be an effortless solution—in fact it would take considerable attention to detail in the quality control department! Primarily, the thing to focus on would be the characteristics that Boxers share around the world, and those which set them apart. Then in order to realize this Universal Type matter, we gravitate toward the moderate, balanced, middle ground, where all can be content with the resulting effect of Boxers being shared throughout the world, enlarging the gene pool exponentially, and likely improving the general health benefits of those Boxers retaining that diversity in their heritage.

There are many benefits to this gravitation towards universal type, but probably the most significant in my opinion would be the 'gifts' of health and breed vigor. Then follows the ability to integrate foreign lines with minimum risk of deviation in the first generation. I believe it is commonly accepted by Boxer fanciers having observed the cross of North American types with those of foreign types, that the first generations are often much different than either of their par-



ents, to the point that they often encounter difficulty being accepted as dogs of outcrossed type. That generation, when bred back to one side or the other, generally produces renovated versions of the linebred part of their pedigree, due to the hybrid vigor which came with the introduction of the outside line's genetic contribution. This observation is inherent with firsthand experience of introducing an unrelated dog of a certain "heritage", finding the first generation, dogs of quality, though with types somewhat awkward to categorize. Then using the result of that outcross breeding back to the more familiar line of comparable quality and noting numerous individuals that appear to possess quality which exceeds that of both parents. If there were more universal type stud offerings conveniently available, it could provide more opportunities for the first generation, instead of the limbo that is encountered waiting for that generation to be committed back to one side or the other.

Please, consider that there is much potential to remedy the deviant characteristics of noteworthy calibre Boxers in any region with 'careful' (keyword) exchange of other quality examples with our distant comrades joined in improving the Boxer breed. For instance:

- Breeders abroad producing Boxers of much 'cobbler' or stocky type, with heavy fronts (deep chested with short upper and lower arms, tight angles and bunched musculature) and strong but somewhat

straight, imbalanced rears, could likely make use of some worthy North American lines, with their better proportioning and overall balance, to add a bit of elegance of posture and gracefulness of movement.

- Some breeders concentrating on mostly North American lines could be impressed with the results of utilizing Boxers from Europe, UK, Australia, with regard to their strength and substance to spare, which offer their dogs a chance of becoming dogs with functionality, rather than couch and yard ornaments. In addition, the thoughtful working drive disposition can be an asset to the lines more weak in temperament, noted in some imports.

- Northern and Southern European breeders, with their pedigrees tighter in working dog lines, offer intelligence and trainability (through desire to please their humans) to many breeders in need of that influence. This virtue of intelligence lends a new Heir to the regal, noble bearing which is a fundamental factor in evaluating a Boxer's merit.

- Breeders from all around can find benefits from 'blending' (key word) Boxers with superior head form, as it pertains to all the various standards distinguishing the details of the perfect Boxer head. Few head types in Boxers come without their own deficiencies and carefully intermingling those types with the express intention of reinvigorating features distinct worldwide. Clearly, the details of that thought are for a much greater body of work than what I have outlined here, but definitely worth mention. Perhaps, my next challenge will be to prepare a study on the many different head types and their significant virtues of, and departures from, a recognizable worldwide Boxer type.

In summary, though my opinions have clearly taken shape with influences of my personal chronicles in Boxer history, it is my wish that Boxer breeders around the world have the ability to comprehend my foresight into the future of a breed so dear to my soul, and welcome the idea of a Universal Boxer Type to focus and discuss. ■