



BMDCA Info Series

Learning About BMDs Through Berner-Garde

2011 #21

Introduction ► The Berner-Garde Foundation (“BGF” or Berner-Garde – www.bernergarde.org) was established to collect, maintain, and disseminate information about genetic diseases observed in the Bernese Mountain Dog. BGF is an independent, tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization with its own Board of Directors. Its mission is “... to ensure that all Bernese Mountain Dogs (BMD) have a long and healthy lifespan of twelve-fourteen years.” According to the most recent **BMDCA Health Report**, the dogs included in that analysis, on average, lived to be a little less than eight years old. (http://www.bmdca.org/health/Miscellaneous/2005_BMDCA_Health_Survey.pdf)

The BGF database contains information that has been compiled over many years from voluntary submissions received from owners and other public information sources, including the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) and the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF). The information in the Berner-Garde database is publicly available online, free of charge to everyone. Puppy buyers, owners, and breeders can use the database for a wide variety of purposes, as can all veterinarians and researchers, especially those who are working to reduce genetic disease in the breed. Among the critically important features to ongoing users and those that delight new users are the system’s ease of use, robust search capabilities, and ever-growing database. Mining meaningful information has never been so easy!

The primary focus of this **Info Sheet** is to describe some of the BGF database search capabilities and suggest how the information gathered might assist in breed and breeder research. Remember that the results of this research should be combined with insights gained through initiatives such as discussions with others knowledgeable about the breed, interviews with breeders through which you can assess rapport and fit with your expectations, networking, kennel visits, and reference checking. Other roles and resources provided by Berner-Garde also will be outlined, and the ease and importance of inputting data into the database are highlighted.

BGF Database & Learning About BMDs ► There are several “Reports and Queries” categories that might be of interest to those wanting to get insights about the breed. All of the BGF database queries utilize drop-down menus and are “select-and-click” simple to use. Once the user has selected the parameters for a search and hits “submit,” a list of dogs meeting the search criteria will be shown on the computer screen. Within each dog’s listing, there are active links upon which the viewer can click if additional information is desired about that dog, its owner, or breeder. This includes access to the dog’s pedigree,

photo if on file, health information, etc.

As an example, an individual contemplating the breed who is interested in competitive/performance activities, such as Agility, could click on the “Dogs By Title/Award Query” button, select “Agility Excellent Preferred” from the extensive drop-down menu, and then view the list of records that will appear. The menu contains virtually all of the recognized titles and sponsoring organizations in obedience, rally, agility, tracking, draft/carting, herding, conformation, etc. in which Berners and their owners compete in the US, Canada, UK, and many other countries.

A similar search capability can be found in the “Health Query” section. From drop-down menus, the individual first selects data elements by category, such as “Cancer/Neoplasms/Tumors,” then selects a diagnosis such as “Osteosarcoma,” and then selects a “Location,” such as “Legs.” In this case well over fifty records appear that provide the individual with access to the files of each dog, owner, and breeder for further information if desired. Currently, there are 14 health categories, and when combined with the drop-down menus in “Diagnosis” and “Location,” the ability to “slice-and-dice” this data is almost endless.

Another valuable research tool is the “Certification/Test Query.” Here the drop-down menus are organized by the following categories: “Evaluated by”; “What was tested”; “Findings”; “Sex”; and an optional “beginning date” and “end date” so that items within a specific time period can be isolated. An example of how this resource might be utilized would be to query BMDs having been evaluated by PennHIP (Pennsylvania Hip Improvement Program) or a subset thereof. All of the health-certifications that are recommended specifically for BMDs by the BMDCA, in addition to others, are included in this portion of the database. Again, this query capability offers answers to endless questions with only the effort of a little thought and a few clicks.

Another feature is the ability to search for veterinarians and vet hospitals that have been entered into the system. From that information you can access the dog’s record.



Irresistible!
But what facts can be learned through the Berner-Garde database?

For more information, please visit our website at www.bmdca.org.

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BGF Database & Learning About BMD

Breeders ► Again, the old saying of “let your fingers do the walking” applies. If you attended a dog-related event, for example, and saw a Berner in which you are interested but only managed to get its registered or call name, you might not know how to find contact information for the breeder or owner. If the dog has been entered into the BGF database, there are several ways you can try to find this information. Once you have entered the online database as a “Guest,” click on “Dogs,” and enter the dog’s registered or call name and any additional information you have. Hopefully its record will appear. If you are a BMDCA member you also could use the “Kennel Name Report,” for often times the first “word” in a dog’s registered name is the kennel name of the breeder. If you managed to get all or part of the owner’s or breeder’s name but not the dog’s name, you would click on the “People” button and follow a similar process to find the information you are seeking.

The BGF database is a great tool for puppy buyers who want to learn about BMD breeders and some of their breeding practices. For Bernese, there are several health-tests and certifications that responsible breeders are sure to complete, consider in their breeding decisions, and disclose to others. While responsible breeders often complete and share the results of additional tests (e.g., thyroid and Degenerative Myelopathy screening), the current BMDCA-recommended health and certification information for Berners is: AKC DNA profile, von Willebrand’s Disease, Hip Dysplasia, Elbow Dysplasia, Eye Clearance, and Congenital Heart Disease. All of this information is maintained in the BGF database. Breeders and owners also are encouraged to enter health information, including cause and date of death, throughout the dog’s life.

By searching through the “People” function to locate the breeder, a puppy buyer can mine considerable information. The first red flag should be if the BMD breeder and his/her dogs are not entered into the BGF database. The next thing to verify is whether a BMD breeder is consistently completing and reporting health-test and evaluation results. The database user also can see what the results are for that breeder’s dogs over time, the longevity of that breeder’s lines, health issues that have been reported, and other information that is contained in the various dogs’ records under that breeder’s name.

Another powerful tool for puppy buyers, breeders, and others is the “Litters Bred” query through which one can navigate to gather information about health-evaluation results, health information, longevity, etc. for any dog’s dam, sire, half-siblings from other litters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. Two quick things to look for are completeness and absence of data. This can help verify a breeder’s participation in open information sharing and preliminarily assess claims made regarding his/her dogs and/or breeding history (e.g., “my lines are cancer-free and long-lived”). For example, if there is data on only one puppy out of a litter of eight, or if there is no multi-generational data on related dogs, these statements seemingly lack substantiation and should prompt you to ask for additional details.

All of this information can be helpful to a puppy buyer who is gathering facts and trying to find a responsible breeder. All of these insights should be combined with knowledge gained from a personal visit(s) to the breeder’s kennel where rapport with the breeder can be assessed, as can the temperament and type of the litter, dam, and sire, if he is available.

BGF Database & Running Simple Reports ► Once it becomes apparent how simple the Berner-Garde database is to use, the fact-based buyer, owner, and breeder might wish to explore its other capabilities, for they are equally easy and intuitive. Reports by offspring, owner, breeder, stud book, and other categories can be generated. Through “The Bernese Mountain Dog Stud Finder” one can run a report with search parameters that include drop-down menu selections for age/health, certification testing, location (where the dog resides), and other criteria (champion/non-champion and photo availability). Also, functionality has been built into the BGF 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.

Other Berner-Garde Roles & Resources ► On the Home Page on the BGF website, there are navigation buttons allowing easy access to other important and helpful information.

The current health studies that target Bernese Mountain Dogs are listed by category with information that includes the disease(s) being studied, researcher(s), and contact information for participation and more information. Additional research studies of interest to the BMD community also are listed with links.

As part of its mission to improve the health and longevity of Berners, Berner-Garde and Michigan State University, with support from the BMDCA, have established a Repository that collects, stores, and maintains DNA and tumor tissue samples from Bernese Mountain Dogs. The goal of the Repository is to facilitate research on serious genetic diseases affecting the breed. The samples collected, along with the health and pedigree information in the Berner-Garde database, will assist researchers who have been hampered in the past by the lack of samples as well as insufficient medical and pedigree information. Everyone who has a Berner can help, as DNA samples are needed from both healthy and affected dogs. Information about how to submit samples is provided on the website.

Inputting BMD Information into the BG Database

► While the focus of this *Info Sheet* has been on retrieving and using data from the BGF database, it is important to note how quick and easy it is to enter information about your Berner into the system. One simply clicks on “Submit Data,” then selects “Individual Dog Submission Form” and completes the short electronic form, which only takes a few minutes. The task will be even faster if you have your dog’s *AKC Registration Form* and breeder’s name and contact information handy when you do this. It is important that every Berner’s information is entered into the system, even if the dog is not going to be used for breeding, since one of its close relatives might be. Obtaining and reporting health-evaluation results for hips and elbows, heart disease, eye disease, etc., on all BMDs is critical in assessing health advancements over time. As your dog ages, be sure to enter health updates including the cause and date of death. If your Berner has a tumor or illness that is the subject of a research study, please consider participating in that study and submitting tissue to the Repository. All of these actions are part of responsible ownership, and with the collective impact of Berner owners working together, we can achieve the goals of steadily increasing the breed’s average length of life while also enhancing the breed’s quality of life.