

Understanding Brackett – An Introduction

- by Dr. Robin R. Lyle

"Let the sire of the sire become the grandsire on the dam's side."

- Lloyd C. Brackett

As you move among breeders of the German Shepherd Dog, it's inevitable that you will often hear the name "Brackett" dropped in the conversation. "Let the sire of the sire become the grandsire on the dam's side," is the single most recognizable Brackett quotation. However, understanding Brackett goes much deeper than knowing this single foundational principle and striving to apply it to a breeding program.

What I will attempt in the articles that follow will be to analyze the writing of Lloyd Brackett by utilizing his booklet entitled *Planned Breeding*. Brackett's booklet is a compilation of articles written for *Dog World Magazine* in 1960. These articles earned him the Dog Writer's Association Award for Best Non-Professional Work in the dog press that year. *Dog World* published these articles in booklet form in 1961 as a result of the hundreds of requests from their readers. I have gleaned ten (10) insights or principles from *Planned Breeding* based upon my careful reading and analysis.

As a preface to sharing my summary, I enclosed the following editorial notes about Brackett, which are included in the booklet:

"One of the fathers of the German Shepherd in this country and the oldest living continuous fancier of the breed in America (since 1912) his theories on breeding have been more than proven in the Long-Worth Kennels where he established his own strain in the breed and produced more than 90 champions in only 12 years—a world's record for any breed."

"Known affectionately as 'Mr. German Shepherd'; he has proven beyond doubt the soundness of his breeding program."

Carmen Battaglia wrote an article entitled "Brackett's Formula," in which he noted the following:

*"By the early 1950s, Lloyd C. Brackett had become a legend in his own time. In part because of the quality of the dogs he produced and in part because of his candor when addressing problems related to the breeding of canines. He had much to say about the selection of sires, how to correct problems and how to make improvements . . . Brackett was well read and a quick learner. Through his writings he shed light on the confusion and misunderstandings associated with line and inbreeding."*ⁱⁱ

Battaglia espouses Brackett's breeding program, indicating that his methods and ideas were not new. However, he points out that Brackett "combined the study of pedigrees with the results they produced. After years of watching what combinations produced the better offspring, he refined his ideas about how to select breeding partners. Out of these experiences came a formula that later would make him famous."ⁱⁱⁱ

The German Shepherd Dog Club of America (GSDCA) has even designated an award (Lloyd Brackett Award) in memory of his contribution to the breed. This award is for a member of the GSDCA whose breeding program exhibits a vision of improvement to the breed, tempered with the wisdom to exhibit strict attention to the standard of the German Shepherd Dog. The recipient(s) are those whose dogs display a consistency of breed type, and have created a line of German Shepherds easily recognizable.

Briefly outlined below are the ten foundational principles which I find within Brackett's planned breeding program:

- **#1 Learn What a Good GSD specimen is!**
- **#2 Build a Strain!**
- **#3 Build Your Kennel on the Selection of Bitches!**
- **#4 Linebreed/Inbreed Wisely!**
- **#5 Outcross—But Only for Definite Purposes!**
- **#6 Know What to Expect through Inheritance!**
- **#7 Know Faults for Correction through Physical Compensation!**
- **#8 Use Only Outstanding Studs!**
- **#9 Always Select the Best Bitch Puppies!**
- **#10 Breed Back to Your "Toppers"!**

"Perhaps the easiest fault for a beginner to recognize, as well as the most important in many breeds, is that of temperament (again not the result of a single genetic factor), . . ."^{iv}

- Lloyd C. Brackett

Understanding Brackett—Part I

As I have analyzed the writing of Lloyd Brackett by utilizing his booklet entitled *Planned Breeding*, I have gleaned 10 insights or principles based upon my careful reading and analysis. In this part, I will discuss principles 1-5.

#1 Learn What a Good GSD specimen is!

“To the many, however, who seem sincerely interested in breeding better specimens, to the many who want to know HOW to do it, I want to stress as strongly as I can: YOU MUST FIRST KNOW WHAT IS A GOOD DOG OF YOUR BREED. In other words, know your breed before you try to breed it.”^{xv}

The genesis of any potential breeding program must be the breed standard. How can one possibly know what the desired outcome of potential breedings will be without first establishing what is the ideal—the standard of the breed? An oft-repeated statement is made that the perfect German Shepherd Dog has not yet been born. Obviously, this is true. Nonetheless, it can't prevent a conscientious breeder from striving to breed the perfect German Shepherd Dog.

Next, after studying the breed standard, one must place themselves into circumstances to see and evaluate as many dogs as possible. This might most easily be accomplished today by:

- Attending dog shows in which your breed is shown and judged; both specialty and all-breed shows. Evaluate each class of dogs according to the breed standard and rank them within that class and eventually the winners.
- Finding a regional specialty club, join that club and attend as many functions as possible.
- Talking with knowledgeable people in one's breed — judges, handlers, breeders, and owners who show.
- Joining the German Shepherd Dog Club of America (GSDCA).
- Attending seminars and educational programs sponsored by the GSDCA.
- Reading the *German Shepherd Dog Review* and other GSD magazines (such as the *German Shepherd Quarterly*).
- Referencing the annual Redbook published by the GSDCA and the Bluebook (which has articles dealing with health and genetic issues relative to the GSD). You will find timely information and helpful interviews with breeders, up-to-date health issues and highlights, as well as shown results, etc...

Brackett adamantly expressed that the basic prerequisite to starting a breeding program is to learn what a good German Shepherd Dog specimen is. He forcefully stated that it is better not to breed than to breed without knowledge. His own words espouse this foundational principle:

“It is very evident to me now that I have presupposed a greater knowledge of what constitutes a good animal of any given breed than the majority of its fanciers possess. This being true, it seems to behoove me now again to warn some of today's breeders NOT to attempt to do close-up breeding; in fact, not to do ANY breeding until they have a better knowledge of WHAT they want to get FROM their matings.”^{xvi}

Brackett would advocate that all responsible breeders should be able to recognize a good specimen first and foremost. Secondly, one must be able to note *“any and all faults or shortcomings”^{xvii}* of the GSD. It goes without saying that one cannot know the faults and shortcomings without knowing The Standard.

#2 Build a Strain!

Brackett readily admits to learning by his own mistakes. He, too, had previously practiced what he estimated that 98 percent of the average dog fanciers had done — mated the best bitches to the best available males, regardless of bloodlines. He further indicated that he employed compensatory matings by *“using studs strong in characteristics in which bitches needed improvement.”^{xviii}*

The strategy in which Brackett would implement to improve his breeding program would center upon building a distinct strain. This would be accomplished within the breed by using three (3) great males. Brackett elaborated that this plan produced more than the average number of good specimens. However, this still did not give him the multiple champion litters, nor establish a definite TYPE which he desired. His reassessment at that point moved his plan to the necessity of utilizing the power of inbreeding and line-breeding.

Building a strain was achieved through the repeated use of three (3) foundation males:

1. US CH Pfeffer v. Bern
2. US CH Odin v. Busecker-Schloss
3. US CH Arras a.d. Stadt-Berbert

Of interest is the factor that all three of these dogs were “stemmed closely and strongly” from German Sieger Utz von Haus-Schutting. Pfeffer v. Bern and Odin v. Busecker-Schloss were half-brothers by the same sire; while Arras’ dam (Stella) was the offspring of a half-brother-sister mating in which Utz was the sire of the sire and the dam.

Brackett would, in fact, build his strain within the breed by using three males as his foundation stones – and they were three males that were all closely related.

#3 Build Your Kennel on the Selection of Bitches!

Brackett next moved forward to find the right bitches on which to move his plan to the point of implementation. The acquisition of worthy bitches is a difficult proposition for any generation. Breeders are reluctant to part with quality bitches.

‘Mr. German Shepherd,’ as he was affectionately known, said that *“it is a much-used aphorism that no stable is better than its mares, and no kennel better than its bitches. That, of course, is true. The most valuable acquisition a would-be dog breeder can make is that of a good bitch or bitches. Without one or more of these, the tasks of breeding superior specimens in any breed is a long, if not, indeed, a hopeless one.”*^x

As difficult as this seems, Brackett added an additional precondition into the formula: The bitches must be daughters of certain studs. It took him an additional two years to purchase bitches who were in fact daughters to the three outstanding foundation studs (Pfeffer v. Bern, Odin v. Busecker-Schloss and Arras a.d. Stadt-Verbert).

In addition to the stipulation that these three bitches must be related closely to the three outstanding studs, each bitch had to possess the attribution of a show specimen with the proper genetic background.

#4 Linebreed/Inbreed Wisely!

“The subject of inbreeding and line-breeding might be summed up this way: Probably no great epoch or step forward in any breed has ever been achieved without the constant and unhesitating use of consanguinity; at the same time we must realize that its use is full of dangers and pitfalls for those novice breeders who fail to recognize the imperative need for using only stock which is sound in constitution, organs and structure—and which also possesses points of merit, with NO SINGLE FAULT COMMON TO THE TWO ORIGINAL PARENTS.”^x

As a preface to even the consideration to linebreed or inbreed, there are a number of foundational principles that must be firmly in place:

1. Be able to recognize shortcomings and merits of dogs to be bred.
2. Study the pedigrees of the breeding pair and learn the shortcomings and merits of the breeding pair’s ancestors.
3. Make certain to select near faultless foundation stock.
4. Cull relentlessly.
5. Never mate together two dogs with similar faults.
6. AND remember that “Physical compensation is the foundation rock upon which all enduring worth must be built.”

Brackett used the terminology of “family breeding” to denote the mating of closely related animals which would incorporate both line-breeding and inbreeding. He described line-breeding as “mating animals who are closely related to the same ancestor.”^{xi} It should be noted, however, that the animals are “bred in line” to a common ancestor normally involving the second, third or even more distant generations. Inbreeding denotes an even closer association between the mating pair involving son to mother, father to daughter, brother to sister, half-brother to half-sister.

A valid question to ask: Why would any responsible breeder line-breed or inbreed? Brackett emphatically stated that its purpose is to improve the breed, get the best results possible, and to upgrade one’s stock. The advantage of line-breeding is simply to get predictable results — if the selection has been good, the “pulls” are all in the same direction. One ought to be able to move from hoping for a good result to having the power of the hereditary influence pull these factors into a favorable direction.

The greatest danger or disadvantage associated with line-breeding, according to Brackett, is that the breeder who employs selection by pedigree alone - without consideration given to physical traits of the pair - is the chief danger. Line-breeding does not replace proper selection. **Under no circumstance should a breeder “abandon individual selection” to undertake line-breeding. Meaning, a responsible breeder develops a system of line-breeding that combines animals similar in characteristics, but narrows the pedigree to a few closely related line of descent.**

In a similar manner, the advantages of inbreeding are that the highest percentage of blood of an exceptional dog can be kept. Furthermore, inbreeding holds and makes the greatest use of excellence by doubling up and intensifying good characteristics of the truly exceptional dog. This tool is likewise double-edged because the lesser characteristics are also doubled-up and intensified.

Brackett offered several keys to correctly undertake inbreeding. The first prerequisite is to start with superior animals. Never use mediocre breeding stock. When poor or mediocre specimens are used, expect poor and mediocre results. When superior specimens are used, expect superior results. Learn what inherited traits you are working with. Brackett himself recognized that “any characteristic can be bred up or down, strengthened or weakened, by this method of breeding.”^{xii} His writings indicate his belief that when superior animals are used VIGOR and FERTILITY as well as other attributes will result.

“To those for whom it is written, however, a summation of the total effects of inbreeding, and to a modified degree that of line-breeding, follows: All characteristics - both good and bad - exist in various degrees in different dogs. . . Results are entirely dependent upon SELECTION, remembering that ‘Physical compensation is the foundation rock upon which all enduring worth must be built.’”^{xiii}

#5 Outcross—But Only for Definite Purposes!

“I will state unequivocally that ‘nobody but nobody’ amongst them is going to do constructive animal breeding or produce a satisfactory percentage of top specimens, and must certainly they WILL NOT build a strain within the breed. This having been proved to be true innumerable times by geneticists and all successful animal breeders, regardless of variety, what follows can be of value or interest to those now doing such outcross breeding only for one reason: to demonstrate why they are not getting the desired results.”^{xiv}

Brackett emphatically stated that one must outcross only for a definite purpose. In doing so, one may find that the first generation of outcross generally will prove successful. However, the offspring of succeeding generations of outcross breeding will be a “heterogeneous lot,” which displays any lack of uniformity. Breeders face the danger of losing any breed type they desire to retain. This has the potential of being very notable in differing type in both size and proportion.

Furthermore, Brackett advocated out-crossing only for specific purpose. This could be employed “to correct a fault or faults which may have shown up in his inbred strain.”^{xv} The more distant breeding undertaken, the less uniformity. Brackett rests this premise on the authority of Onstott, who stated that “any virtues which may be added to a strain through outcrossing . . . cannot be looked upon as inherit in that strain until they have been purified and fixed within that strain through inbreeding.”

In Part II, I will continue to elaborate upon Brackett’s foundation principles, detailing 6 – 10:

- Know What to Expect Through Inheritance!
- Know Faults for Correction through Physical Compensation!
- Use Outstanding Studs!
- Always Select the Best Bitch Puppies!
- Breed Back to Your Toppers!

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End notes - Introduction

ⁱ Brackett, Lloyd C. *Planned Breeding*, page 2 (Editorial Notes).

ⁱⁱ Carmen L. Battaglia, [Brackett’s Formula](#). Accessed from <http://www.breedingbetterdogs.com/bracket.html> , January 27, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Brackett, page 27.

^v Brackett, Lloyd C. *Planned Breeding*, page 20.

^{vi} Ibid., page 19.

^{vii} Ibid., page 19.

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- viii Ibid., page 10.
ix Ibid., page 11.
x Ibid., page 20.
xi Ibid., page 3.
xii Ibid., page 5.
xiii Ibid., page 6.
xiv Ibid., pages 14-15.
xv Ibid., page 15.

End notes – Part I

- ¹Brackett, Lloyd C. *Planned Breeding*, page 20.
²Ibid., page 19.
³Ibid., page 19.
⁴Ibid., page 10.
⁵Ibid., page 11.
⁶Ibid., page 20.
⁷Ibid., page 3.
⁸Ibid., page 5.
⁹Ibid., page 6.
¹⁰Ibid., pages 14-15.
¹¹Ibid., page 15.