

Title: Hipscoring Myths and Legends

Subtitle: Health

Second Subtitle: #0 The importance of doing your own, independent research before the purchase of any UK puppy.

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Summary: I feel the time has come to write this article on hip scoring; the importance of it in a breeding program and what it actually means for you, the puppy owner.

Increasingly we see litters of Cane Corsos being advertised; I would estimate that roughly 80% of these litters are from parents who have not been hip scored, which means no x-ray has been taken of the parents' hips, and then evaluated by a board of veterinary professionals. Therefore these dogs are being bred from blind with no understanding the relative likelihood of them suffering from a hereditary form of Hip Dysplasia, a painful and incurable condition prevalent in large breed dogs (to imagine the condition, think of the back end of a very old German Shepherd.)

I am under no illusion that the system is perfect - it's possible that on one day you can submit an x-ray to the British Veterinary Association and it will come back as 5:5. Send the same x-rays a week later, the panel may have changed staff, or might have felt differently on the day, perhaps this time you will have a 8:4 or even a 10:8! No, it's not perfect, but at least you will have a rough idea! At Boleyn Cane Corso I also take a picture of each and every one of my x-rays before they are sent to the BVA, I get these x-rays checked with many of my international breeder contacts and an Italian professor of veterinary medicine.

To date I have scored 9 Boleyn Cane Corsos under the UK BVA scheme. Every dog x-rayed was sent for scoring and all of my dogs are below the breed mean score of 25. My scores range from 6 to 22. I have also scored one import with a hip score of 39.

I am not a breeder obsessed with hips, I don't have only low scored dogs here in my kennel, because I realise if we just breed for hips alone we lose type, we lose the Corso. But as this breed is a Molosser, or giant breed, the hips will always be an important factor in breeding and also selection of breeding stock.

What I do find totally irresponsible are these old wives tales that are spun, so that people then go on to breed from dogs without x-ray or score.

'They do not score their dogs in Italy' **FALSE**

Most Italian kennels have realised that hip scoring is the responsible way forward for breeding. The majority of breeders do this and have achieved greater health as a result of this.

'The dog can run and jump so its hips are fine' **FALSE**

Outward signs of hip dysplasia can range from none all the way to severe pain. The dog's movement may or may not be affected. Which means that it does not matter what the dog moves like, it's not

an indication that the dog does or does not have heritable HD.

Breeding from HD free dogs will not necessarily guarantee that their offspring will be HD free. An HD control programme in Sweden showed that:

Normal-to-Normal matings produced 18% dysplastic offspring.

Normal to Dysplastic matings produced 59% dysplastic offspring.

Dysplastic to Dysplastic matings produced 87% dysplastic offspring.

When someone calls me, informing me their puppy is lame I ask them about whether or not the parents of the pup were hip scored.

The answers I usually get back are the following:

The breeder told me he has never had any problems with hips.

The breeder told me he has good hips because his dogs can run and jump,

The breeder told me the parents have good hips – because they can jump a five bar gate - people really seem to fall for this one

The breeder told me that in other countries the Corso is not scored

The breeder told me because the breed is not KC Registered then they cannot hip score their dogs.

Answer to all the above: Unless the breeder shows you the green BVA hip score certificates of the parents, you cannot know for sure that the parents have been radiographed. And unless your dog/puppy has been x-rayed, you cannot know for sure that he or she is HD free, even if the parents are clear. There are no 100% guarantees. When a breeder says he has never had any problems and does not have any documentation to back it up, beware. He probably has never 'had' any problems because he has never checked for any problems and neither has anyone who bought a puppy from him.

Remember, this person may have paid a lot of money for a breeding dog, they may also be attached to it and think it's a super example of a Corso, but have got a terrible score, or even found that their dog is dysplastic. Sadly, there are some people who will not let that stop their dog reproducing – if they have nothing to worry about by getting the dog scored, you have to ask yourself why they haven't.

As for it all being unnecessary...tell that to the little girl who had to have her puppy be put to sleep because it could no longer walk and her family could not afford the expensive surgery. Your best bet is to buy from a breeder who can prove that several generations of your puppy's pedigree are certified clear of HD and even then there is no guarantee that your pup will grow up free of HD, it will just reduce the risk.