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VDH, GKF and veterinary universities launch study to improve health of flat-faced dogs

New fitness test for pugs

Brachycephalic dog breeds have shorter muzzles and flatter faces than other breeds. Extreme brachycephalic breeds may suffer health problems, the most obvious being shortness of breath and impaired thermal regulation.

The best known and also most widespread representative of this type of dog breed is the pug. Over the last few decades, pugs have been selectively bred and some of their specific physical characteristics did show a tendency to exaggeration. This trend has led to an increase in health problems. As early as ten years ago, VDH's scientific advisory board began working to develop and establish a fitness test to counter this worrying trend. Since 2009, passing this test is a prerequisite for breeding these dogs under VDH supervision.

In the Netherlands, the legal conditions for breeding brachycephalic dogs have changed. Breeding approval is now determined on the basis of a system that measures the length of a dog's nose in relation to its skull. In the opinion of VDH's scientific advisory board, this measurement alone is not a reliable scientific criterion for assessing a dog's physical health, which should also include a number of other criteria and their interaction.

Given its role in setting strict breed standards, VDH has been working closely with the Federal Veterinary Chamber and the German Veterinary Society over the last two years to introduce measures to improve the health of the breed.

As a result of this work, Professor Dr. Ingo Nolte of the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover has developed a standardized, treadmill fitness test, which is carried out under strictly controlled environmental conditions. The dog's heart and respiratory rate are measured at different running speeds and over different periods of time.

The fitness test can be conducted at the veterinary medicine faculties of the universities in Gießen, Hannover, Leipzig and Munich as from now. It is not only available to dogs bred under VDH supervision, but to every pug. Moreover, thanks to generous funding from the German Society for the Support of Canine Research (GKF), the test is being offered free of charge for the next two years. The aim of the accompanying study is to identify the most resilient dogs among the pug population in order to establish the healthiest possible pool for breeding. VDH firmly believes that this large-scale study is a significant step towards restoring the breed and ensuring a healthy future for sweet, companionable pugs everywhere.

This press release and a selection of images are available for free download at www.vdh.de/presse

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About the VDH (German Kennel Club)

For more than 100 years, the VDH has been representing the interests of dog-owners in Germany. Today, the VDH has more than 650,000 members. Over 250 different breeds of dogs are supervised through the VDH breeding clubs and bred under the strictest of controls.

For more information, please visit: www.vdh.de