

Heartbreak hounds

by Diane Ford

Autoimmune disease, dilated cardiomyopathy and hemangiosarcoma in dogs.

Many owners and breeders of Salukis are very fortunate to never experience any of these disorders in their dogs, whether acquired through a breeder or in dogs they have bred themselves.

My husband and I were not so lucky. In the 15 years of owning, showing, coursing and participating in other venues with our Salukis, we have experienced autoimmune disease, dilated cardiomyopathy and hemangiosarcoma. Each affected Saluki

mid-teens. Canine autoimmune disease can be caused by hereditary factors, side effects of medications, pollutants, food preservatives and pesticides. With Lady, our first clue that something was amiss was her lack of luster and energy. Further vet examination revealed pale gums and low red blood cells. In canine autoimmune hemolytic anemia (AIHA), the autoantibody targets the red blood cells and destroys them. Our vet treated Lady with

Heart break

'Kiki' was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) at the age of two. After the breeder discovered DCM in a littermate, she encouraged us to have an echocardiogram done on Kiki. Dr. Philip Schott, D.V.M., performed the echo and discovered that indeed she did have it. DCM is the second most common heart disease in dogs after mitral valve disease.

In DCM, the heart is unable to contract normally and as the heart muscle stretches, it becomes bigger and less effective. DCM-affected dogs usually develop signs of heart failure and abnormal heart rhythms. Owners most commonly recognize exercise intolerance and breathlessness in their dog, but lack of appetite, depression and excessive drinking are also common. The first sign in many dogs is coughing and collapse. You may notice that your dog has lost weight. This is due to cardiac cachexia. If ascites develop, the abdomen may be distended, which you might mistake for weight gain. Some dogs with DCM die suddenly without any notice, which was the case with Kiki.

After playing outside with the other dogs, she ran into the house and was waiting by the kitchen cupboard for her doggie treat, when she suddenly dropped dead at my feet. She hit the kitchen floor, had some minor twitching in her legs, her gums and tongue went blue and she was gone. She lived to be nine years old. The vet and staff at the clinic complimented us and said that had we not kept Kiki in such good health, she would have died much sooner. This gave us some comfort while we grieved over her loss.

Cancer

Almost one month later, to the date, 'Daizy' passed away from angiosarcoma.



came from three separate breeders and unrelated lines.

'Lady,' our first Saluki, died of autoimmune hemolytic anemia at the age of five. A littermate was diagnosed with the same disease, but was treated and lived to her

steroids and chemotherapy drugs to halt her immune system from attacking the red blood cells. Our last resort was to transfuse her with blood to bring up her red blood-cell count, but she passed before we were able to perform any transfusions.



Angiosarcoma is a malignant cancer that arises from the vascular endothelial cells. Because the tumour originates in the blood system, they are easily spread to other areas of the body and can be found just about anywhere. In Daizy's case, the

tumour started in her right ventricle, which ruptured it when it grew large enough. A necropsy revealed the tumour's location and that it had already spread to her liver and kidneys. In fact, studies show that survival times of 20 to 60 days following

the detection of the tumour, with only a one-year survival rate of less than 10 per cent of patients.

A few months later, we lost 'Dino' to old age. The loss of three dogs in five months was extremely hard. Our dogs are a big part of our lives. They are with us from morning till night, often sharing the same meals and the same bed. The rest of the dogs had to make an adjustment to the pack hierarchy as well and this too was difficult to watch.

I am making a plea to each and every breeder of Salukis to please be stringent in your breeding practices and only breed animals that are healthy and free of disorders. I know that things are beyond your control like environmental factors, medications and pesticides. But if we are honest about what is happening in our lines and what happens to our dogs, then maybe, just maybe, we can prevent heartache down the road for one family.

Don't Cry For Me When I'm Gone

Three score and ten are given to man;
 But ours is a much briefer span.
 So, though I give you all my heart,
 The time will come when we must part.
 But all around you, you will see,
 Creatures that speak to you of me;
 A tired horse, a hunted thing,
 A sparrow with a broken wing...
 Pity and help (I know you will)
 And somehow, I will be with you still;
 And I shall know, although I'm gone,
 The love I gave to you lingers on.

— author unknown

Dedicated in loving memory of Dino, Kiki and Daizy