



Sheepdog Expert Articles

Ceri Rundle talks to International Sheepdog News

Why did you decide to breed your own dogs when there were plenty of Bwlch dogs on your doorstep?

Because it seemed the most natural thing to do and the Bwlch dogs were from my parents' line - established in the early 60's! I thought if I wanted another dog then I could breed one! In the early 80's, my dad had given me a bitch called Nell (ISDS no.120832) to run in trials as she was really easy to handle and could be very dangerous once she got a hold on sheep. She came 'on heat' when my dad was away and I decided to use a dog that I had liked running at the Welsh National - A.Bunt's 'Sweep' (ISDS No.119617). The resultant litter produced a wonderful little bitch that I kept called 'Kay' (ISDS no.151202) that taught me such a lot and won some big trials. In fact, she won the big field at Vivod SDT in Llangollen three years running - twice to qualify and then managed to win the final in 1990. Kay should have been my first 'Moel' dog but at the time of registering the pups there was a bit of a 'mix-up'. I ended up with Lyn's pups in my name rather than my mum's, so they became 'Moel' rather than 'Bwlch' and Nell's pups missed out as Nell was still registered in my dad's name! This was why the well-known 'Moel Craig' was not 'Bwlch Craig'!

What type of dogs were you looking to breed?

Hopefully winners! No, seriously, I wanted hard-workers with nice temperaments and brains, full of class, plenty of guts and, in my opinion, good looking (sorry Austin!). I wanted (and I still do) to produce the type of dogs that I would choose for myself and not just breed pups that would sell. There is a big difference.

How did you go about getting started?

As I have already said, my first litter was from Nell and then I had hoped to mate 'Kay' but she never ever came 'on heat' properly. This was possibly as a result of the severe case of gastroenteritis she suffered as a pup and she still holds the record in the vet's surgery for the number of bags of saline drip she went through! As Kay got older, it became apparent that I needed to start thinking of 'replacement' trialling dogs: Kay's partner, 'little'Ted (ISDS no.133548 -; a brilliant little dog that would work for either my dad or I at 'the drop of a hat' but was always overshadowed by his father, Bwlch Taff)

was also getting older... Luckily for me, my mum had a litter of pups out of Del and by Aled Owen's Ben and one of the pups took a real shine to me (brains were obviously there from the start!). He was called Bwlch Hemp, who grew into a very large, handsome devil but was also a real softie! Very persistent though! As a youngster, Hemp was too sensitive for my dad but the two of us really hit it off together and eventually my dad gave him to me! Hemp and I managed to win a good number of top competitions and get into the history books in 1996 by becoming the first lady handler to earn a place in the National Team for Wales. Tragically, Hemp's trialling career was cut short a couple of years later when he had a bad accident.

Bwlch Hemp has made a great impact on your breeding program and been used by others to great success. What is it about him that makes it so?

This is difficult to answer because sometimes we just don't know the answer 'why'. I think we have been very lucky in that the winning combination of Hemp's good temperament, 'class', looks and working ability - drawn on from such dogs as Bwlch Taff - have all worked positively together. Plus, most importantly, Hemp has been able to consistently pass these qualities down through to his offspring. The sign of a true good breeder.

Dolwen Fan is the other half in the Moel story. What can you tell me about her?

When Kay and Ted were 'finishing' their trialling days, I realised I needed some youngsters to start again. Bwlch Hemp was one but I needed another. Our friend, Barbara Hamer, had a litter of pups out of her 'Dolwen Nan' (ISDS no.163833) by my dad's dog, Cap (ISDS no.144844) which were full of the Bwlch line so I managed to persuade her to part with a little bitch that I liked.

'Aunty' had thoughts of keeping the bitch for herself but I gradually 'ground' her down and secured my little Dolwen Fan! Fan was a very small, prick-eared little bitch that looked just like a fox, had a lot of tan and was just pure class! What a back end she had! She was extremely persistent, very sensitive but would never really give-in, and had a real problem with remembering her commands/concentration but on her day she could be brilliant. In fact she should have won the North Wales Nursery Trials Final by a mile but I let her down by completely misjudging the X drive gates! (I discovered I needed a corneal graft in my left eye after that!) I never managed to trial her much though because early on in the following trials season, she had a fright from the people letting out sheep at one of the trials and she never ever forgot it. In fact, she would manipulate situations on her outrun to encourage the sheep to go back to the letting-out pen if she thought there was anyone around and then would refuse to cover. It never

really made any sense as she loved people but it was a problem that I never managed to conquer and so I stopped taking her.

How similar were the Hemp/Fan litters in ability, markings, etc.?

All the puppies were very similar in markings and temperament. They were all tri-coloured and tended to split into two camps ie some would develop a lot of tan (eg Moel Hugo, Hemp, Mo, Spot and Nip) while others would be very black with rich tan markings (eg Moel Nap, Jock, Mirk, Mitch, Mac and Eira). There were only two pups in Fan's last litter before she tragically died - Moel Nip and Moel Mirk, and these are like chalk and cheese in looks but both good young dogs. All the pups were very forward, determined and extremely sociable - and not for the faint hearted! They were all very eager to please (perhaps in doubt sometimes!) but needed to be 'controlled'! I can only really talk about the ones we have kept and trained ourselves but there are two dogs that were 'different' to the rest: One that just didn't want to please at all from being a pup - didn't really want any fuss and was a real xxx(!) and my Moel Cap.

I never considered changing the combination as the pups from the first mating were really promising and my dad had always said that you should never change the combination if it worked. He could site a number of instances where a breeder had changed a successful pairing then returned to use the original dog and it had never worked. Also, I owned both the dogs so had no problems with arranging the matings. The majority of the pups went to working/trialling homes but some went for agility and working trials and have done very well.

What are the characteristics of Moel dogs and bitches (from Hemp & Fan)?

Looks, style, desire to come forward, scope, flexibility, toughness, temperaments, determination, willingness to please, generally very good hips - Moel Eira has perfect hips (Score 0:0) and sheer 'brilliance'!

Who was the first offspring of Hemp & Fan that made you think, Yes! ?

I kept a pup from the first litter called Moel Tweed who was a lovely dog, classy, full of power but very, very tough. At the same time, Jim Dyson was the very proud owner of Tweed's brother, Moel Nap who he ran successfully in the North Wales Nursery Trials before the dog was even 12 months old. This youngster then went to Jaran Knive in Norway and he became a wonderful ambassador for the breed and the 'Moel' prefix. Jaran is such a good handler - a real perfectionist - and has developed a wonderfully successful partnership with Nap and Nap's daughter, Lyn (Continental Champion for the last three years). Since then I have been incredibly lucky in that many of Hemp/Fan pups are in the hands of good trainers/handlers

and so have had the opportunity to shine. Moel Spot and Moel Jock started off with IB Jones and are now with J.McRobert and Jock Welsh in Scotland; Moel Hugo with Lisa Hanson in Sweden; Moel Sam with Tor Geir Ulstein in Norway; Moel Mitch with Philippe Heinz in France; Moel Gel with Bridget Fridley in USA; Moel Magic with Elsie Jammie in South Africa; Moel Jim with Richard Vinsbruk in New Zealand and Moel Hemp with Bryn Davies in North Wales. Not forgetting the 'gang' my dad and I currently trial - Moel Mac, Mirk, Taff, Eira, Fern, Cap and Nip! In fact, there are three complete litters currently trialling in Open competitions here and overseas.

Are all of your Moel line from Hemp / Fan matings?

The majority are although I have had the odd litter from other bitches. For instance, my dad's Moel Roy (ISDS no.210890) is the result of a mating between a bitch called 'Non' (ISDS no.163649) and Bwlch Jim (ISDS no.193651). Interestingly, Bwlch Jim was bred out of Bwlch Hemp's mother, Del and by E.Wyn Edwards' Don (ISDS no.141536).

Have you used any Moel dogs or bitches to breed with?

Yes, we have used a bitch called Moel Mo and mated her with Moel Roy. Also, a good friend of mine, Ceri Ratcliffe, has a Hemp/Fan bitch called Moel Meg which she has mated with a dog of my dad's called 'Craig' (ISDS no.232836) now in Norway, and with Moel Roy. She has kept a pup from each litter and will be trialling both dogs this year. My mum's Moel Eira has had two litters too: One by Medwyn Evans' Lad (ISDS no.214439) and the other by Moel Roy. Interestingly, the mating between Medwyn's Lad occurred while my parents were in USA and I wouldn't tell them which dog I had used until they came home! I think Medwyn was a little 'worried' when we let it slip that my dad knew nothing about it - just after the event! My dad has great hopes for one youngster called 'Bwlch Hemp'(!) and his sister 'Bwlch Jess'. Lisa Hanson in Sweden has just qualified one of their brothers - Bwlch Hjarar for their Nursery Trials Final so it seems that that cross has worked well. There are also some really good dogs by Moel Hemp trialling in North Wales.

Choosing the right dogs to 'use' on our Moel bitches will be the next interesting chapter: I have just mated my Moel Fern with a dog from a completely different line so 'fingers crossed'! If the parents are anything to go by, the offspring should be tough and pushy!

In your opinion where have all the good breeding dogs gone? Abroad perhaps?

I think a number of things could possibly be all to blame.

The current system does not encourage anyone to use an unproven young dog a) as the owner of the bitch, you risk the possibility of her being precluded from the breeding program (I know she does get a second chance

but ...) or b) as the owner of the dog, are you going to risk that dog being taken out of the breeding program by taking 'outside' bitches? The more bitches, the greater the risk of problems.

What sort of dogs do we really want? The dogs that win the Saturday trials are not necessarily the dogs for the big courses. But are the majority of breeders using these dogs because they are not so tough to train/handle and don't need so much work? Are they using purely the dogs that appear to have no risk of eye problems - and who can really blame them? But are these the type of dogs we want to see in the future and are they producing anything equally as good or better?

Times are changing: Fewer shepherds, less sheep, less practical work experience for the dogs. How many handlers now have the opportunity to give their dogs a hard day's practical work? These are the types of dogs that will manage the big courses but there are a great deal more 'Saturday' courses - so maybe its 'horses for courses'!

Maybe the potentially-good offspring from certain dogs are getting into the wrong hands and not getting the correct chance? How many youngsters are totally spoilt by being pushed too soon or sent out too far too soon so they won't make it on to the trials field and won't be seen. I know the Hemp/Fan youngsters need time to mature - they are early starters and are really keen but they are babies at heart. Too much pressure too soon can really spoil them - just as dangerous as allowing them to get away with too much at an early age. All the Hemp/Fan progeny get stronger and continually improve as they mature - just like quality wine!

What are your plans for the future?

Ideally to continue to produce the same calibre of dogs and be lucky enough to get them into the right hands. I shall also need to continue to breed my own future trials dogs. Realistically though, I don't think I will ever have such a phenomenally successful breeding partnership as Hemp/Fan but I will keep trying!

Would you use AI at all?

No, not at the moment and definitely not until all dogs are micro-chipped.

Things were going great for Hemp, then eye problems. This must have been devastating.

Yes, very. Especially as we had tried to be so careful when accepting bitches to be mated: My mum looked at the pedigrees and we insisted all litters be eye tested. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately!) no such problems came to light until a couple of dogs were eye tested when they were over 2 years old - not having been tested as pups. The even more annoying thing was that the incidence of CEA in one of the failures was so minute that there was extreme doubt that it was actually CEA but the bitch

was not given the benefit of the doubt. They never are.

Even more worryingly, another bitch had been mated to Hemp twice very successfully but threw up a CEA failure from their third mating. One of these dogs is apparently quite brilliant and is now up in Scotland. The really hurtful thing about it all is what rubbish some idiots (and that is what they are) have written about Hemp. Whatever anyone tries to say, there is no disputing the fact that there is not another dog in the country which has so consistently produced top quality dogs from a wide range of bitches - ask Jim Cropper about his Sid or John Thomas about his Cherryholme Gel. If Hemp had been precluded from the breeding programme any earlier, we would have missed his seven offspring running at last year's World Championship and the three Hemp/Fan sons running in the final at Deerplay - Moel Spot winning the Qualifier and Moel Taff winning the Championship. What a crime that would have been for our breed and for our sport's future.

Has there been any CEA/PRA in the pedigree of Hemp?

Not on the dam's side but there were a number of CEA failures on the father's side - allegedly. The rules were very different re CEA before Hemp's time weren't they? Who really knows what the true picture was - or is - re CEA. One of the worst 'carriers' is still to be found in a great number of pedigrees today. In fact, I am sure if you look hard enough, you will almost always be able to find one 'culprit' - so for how many generations will the 'problems' carry through?

Do the existing rules for eye testing treat the problem in a fair manner?

Absolutely not, no! Not enough is known about the incidence of CEA but it is those of us who are being open and honest about it all who are being penalised. The whole 'problem' has been driven underground so we will all pay the price in the coming years.

For example: Breeder A has a litter of 6 pups and takes them at 6 weeks of age to Eye Vet (1) who fails one pup. Breeder A tells the vet that the litter is out of unregistered parents so there is no need for paperwork. Breeder A then takes the 5 'clear' puppies to Eye Vet (2) who unsurprisingly 'Passes' the 'whole' litter. As the purchaser of one of these Passed/Clear puppies, you would be totally unaware that a litter-mate had failed. (Should the 'failure' be put down when, really, having a small degree of CEA will not progress nor impair the dog's working ability?) Further down the line, you decide to breed from your bitch 'puppy' -; with both you and the owner of the chosen stud believing there to be no potential risk of eye problems. How can this be fair?

What about any pups being 'added' and registered to another litter? What is to there to stop a person adding a potentially unregistered puppy to another

litter which can/will be registered?

How many people are aware that if the dog you have used on your bitch, has a second failure marked against him before you have registered your litter of pups, they cannot be registered? This is not fair and legally, I am not sure who stands where either. When the second failure against Hemp cropped up, I had a litter of pups due and another person had two litters of puppies which were around 10 weeks old and were yet to be registered. None of these pups was then able to be registered. Ludicrous! I firmly believe the status of the dog at the time of mating should be accepted - not at the time of registration of his offspring. Who in the Society could possibly have disagreed with this - but they did and for what reason?

But, under the current ruling, why should we breeders bother getting a litter screened at all? Why take the risk? The majority of breeders just want to sell their pups to make money and are not particularly concerned about the future. They could have bred a number of other litters from the same bitch before the first litter's eyes are tested! I also think the buyers are as much at fault? Many are not bothered whether the pups have been tested at all while others are not willing to pay anything extra for this 'guarantee'.

What changes, if any, would you like to see with regards to the rules for eye testing?

No one wants to breed problems do they but surely we should have the choice as to what dogs to use? Otherwise we will end up precluding all the good sires from our breeding programme. I personally think it an absolute crime that a dog such as Bwlch Hemp should be precluded from the breeding programme. Imagine all those wonderful genes being wasted.... How many more wonderful young dogs could have been sired and competing if he was still allowed to breed. He is now over 11 years of age but the desire is still there I can tell you?!

a) I would like to see all our pups either tattooed or microchipped - at the time of eye testing.

b) All pups to be eye tested before registration.

c) All failures to be reported to the Society and marked on the parents' cards but neither parent to be precluded from the breeding programme.

d) All failures to not be registered and 'prevented' from breeding.

I get the impression that many people are 'hanging fire' until the Test for CEA in Border Collies is available but speaking to a number of the Eye Vets I have been told that this test is still several years away. What do we do in the meantime? Nothing? And what happens if, and when, such a test highlights the fact that a huge percentage of our top working dogs actually carry the CEA gene? Nowadays there appears to be a huge number of so-

called 'experts' all talking and 'advising' us about this subject but how many of our Society's decision-makers are 'true breeders'? I firmly believe this is where many of our problems stem from.

(posted 25/07/2003)