



Minimum age of breeding dogs

A suggestion to be discussed by the Meeting of Breed Wardens and Delegates 2017

We sometimes hear that bitches are bred the first time they come in heat, this is at the age of 5 – 7 months.

When the IFR-board decided to analyse existing breeding regulations and the possible suggestion of essential criteria for breeding dogs, the minimum age of breeding dogs was one of the issues to be discussed.

As soon as we published our intentions we received an explicit request by the Swedish Rottweilerclub to pay particular attention to this.

The advocates of breeding regulations that forbid to breed such young bitches will say that this practice is irresponsible while the breeder who uses such young bitches will say that nature allows it. What is true? Is breeding such a young female indeed irresponsible or is this a mere irrelevant emotional reaction?

As the answer will learn, this is an important question!

We have asked the **faculty of veterinary Medicine in Gent** (Belgium) and also the **French ethologist Julie Willems** (ethologist and expert of animal behaviour) for an objective advise. Both, and for similar reasons, advise against breeding a female at her first heat:

The university:

There are several reasons **not** to breed a bitch at first heat:

- first heat is often an abnormal heat: a “Silent Heat” or “Split Heat”.¹

¹ Silent heat: exists when the dog is in heat, is receptive, can get pregnant, but does not show heat signs.

Split heat: exists when the heat cycle begins, but then stops before the second phase (standing heat) begins. It commonly occurs in young dogs during their first heat because the hormonal systems are unable to induce ovulation.



**International Federation Of Rottweilerfriends
Internationale Föderation der Rottweilerfreunde
Federación Internacional De Amigos Del Rottweiler**

- the female is not yet fully grown at that age (larger breeds).
- some disorders can only be detected at the age of approx. 2 years (HD, **hypothyroidism**, ...)
- the maternal behaviour of young animals is not good (they are said to “bad mothers” but in reality, they are just too young).
- these recommendations come by experience rather than scientific studies and many breed clubs will not allow a bitch to breed before she is 2 years old. For large breeds, it would be advised to wait even longer.

The ethologist:

- a bitch of 1 year old is the equivalent of a 16-year-old human girl. The organism of the dog has not yet reached maturity. A young bitch can therefore not use all her resources to carry, feed and raise pups as she still has a large need to develop her own organism.
- a one year old bitch is mentally not ready to be bred and to give birth.
- concerning the behaviour-side, most one year old dogs have not yet matured and have not yet found their own place in hierarchy but are still growing into this and are earning themselves.

This means that they themselves are still at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder of their group. The breeding bitch must however be a mother figure with all the authority that goes with this, as she must teach the pups the principles of hierarchy.

As a bitch of only one year old is herself not mature yet and has not yet found her place in hierarchy, it will be extremely difficult if not impossible for her to assume this function of authority to her puppies.

- Furthermore, such a young age can have an impact on maternal behaviour and can cause the bitch to be a “bad mother”, meaning not occupying herself well with the pups.

Because of this, the pups will lack essential learning and the confidence that is needed for a good mental development. This can lead to inappropriate behaviour when they reach adult age.



**International Federation Of Rottweilerfriends
Internationale Föderation der Rottweilerfreunde
Federación Internacional De Amigos Del Rottweiler**

- No dog of any breed whatsoever, should be bred before 18 months, the human equivalent of 20 years of age, namely the age of physical, social and mental maturity.

Conclusion: the aforementioned specialized sources learn that for both mental and physical reasons and also because otherwise breeding dogs cannot be selected on the absence of certain genetic disorders, bitches should not be bred before they are 20 - 24 months old. Also, before reaching a sufficient physical and mental maturity, a dog cannot participate a breed suitability test, being an essential element of all breeding regulations ²

The IFR-board is of the opinion that the breeding regulations ² of all Member Clubs must before all else respect and protect the dog's physical and mental health, not the economical gain of the breeder.

The IFR-Board therefore strongly suggests the Meeting of Breed Wardens and Delegates to consider:

² Cfr. the IFR-Constitution:

The IFR considers it of prime importance to introduce, continue or intensify efforts, in order to breed exclusively with dogs that are healthy in body and mind, with a self-assured nature, a well-balanced nervous condition and a sufficiently high stimulus threshold.

For this, all members of the IFR commit themselves to:

- *introduce and organize tests of social acceptable behaviour.*
- **introduce and impose breeding regulations** to ensure that a minimal conformation of all breeding dogs to the FCI breedstandard is guaranteed. **These breeding regulations must concern the health of the dogs and their physical and mental conformation to the FCI breedstandard. Part of these regulations must be the successful participation of all breeding dogs to breedsuitability tests.** The memberclubs will decide themselves on the form and content of the test but these must be directed toward the definition of the Rottweiler as mentioned in the FCI-breedstandard.



**International Federation Of Rottweilerfriends
Internationale Föderation der Rottweilerfreunde
Federación Internacional De Amigos Del Rottweiler**

- that the breeding regulations of all Member Clubs should forbid using females younger than 18 months, being an absolute minimum age for a dog to reach sufficient physical and mental maturity to be bred with respect for the health of both the dog and her offspring and to be selected on her physical and mental characteristics by participating a relevant Breed Suitability Test.
- while the reasons mentioned above may possibly not all apply on the male, the IFR-board is nevertheless of the opinion that the same minimum age must be applicable for the male Rottweiler too as breeding at a too young age may affect his education and mental health also, as not all genetic disorders can be detected at a younger age and as participation to a Breed Suitability Test, thus a correct selection on the absence of eliminating faults, demands a minimum physical and mental maturity that is not reached before the age of 18 months.

This advice will be on the agenda of the next Meeting of Breed Wardens and/or the Meeting of Delegates.

On behalf of the IFR-Board,

Dirk Vandecasteele

President.

04.04.2017