



CONFORMATION CONVERSATIONS

BY DEBORAH BLAIR

From the Inside Out:

Food, Supplements & Hair Products – Is There a Limit?

If you're anything like me, you find it easy to fall into patterns. If a food works, you stick with it. If a shampoo and conditioner do their jobs, you stop looking. If you've been feeding certain supplements, you just keep giving them. If it's not broke, don't fix it, right?

Until they stop working. For 20 years, I used the same products. Pro Plan kibble. A little raw or canned meat for flavor. Vitamin C for joints and tissues, Vitamin E for skin. #1 All Systems Shampoo, with a daily spritz of Traleigh's Ultra Phix. Year after year ... generation after generation.

Then one day I realized that my dogs weren't eating enthusiastically and didn't look as good as they should. They seemed a little flabby and out of condition despite daily exercise. Their coats were no longer lustrous, and there wasn't as much undercoat. Part of this could be attributed to the lines I was breeding, of course, but I saw dogs from similar pedigrees doing just fine. As a result, I flipped the table over, so to speak, and started investigating alternatives.

Ever curious, I wondered what food, supplements, shampoos, conditioners and "extras" other people were using and how satisfied they were with the results. This article is based on the answers from 43 people who show Golden (I wish it were 143, so if you are willing to be part of our survey group for future articles, please let me know).

THE INSIDE SCOOP — WHAT ARE WE FEEDING?

The first question asked concerned the main food used and satisfaction with the results. I found it interesting that

every single person said they were happy (or extremely happy) with the health, condition and coats of their dogs. I guess if you aren't, you do what I did and start asking around.

"If an alteration is causing the dog stress or suffering, then I'm all about altering the human instead."

Eighty percent of those surveyed feed some sort of Purina Pro Plan, including the Performance, Sensitive Skin & Stomach, Sport, All Life Stages and Grain Free formulas. The preferred protein was salmon. Branching away from Purina, the others went in more directions than I knew possible. Three feed Fromm Gold Large Breed Adult, with Duck, Chicken, Fish Meal and Lamb protein sources, and one person mixes the Fromm with Regal Sensi Bites Holistic. The rest were all over the place! Earthborn Chicken or Bison, Steve's Raw Lamb alternating with Zignature Lamb Formula, Canine Caviar (lamb and venison), Natures Variety Prairie Lamb & Oatmeal, Nutro Ultra, NutriSource Chicken & Rice Adult, Eagle Pack Original (chicken and pork formula), Precise Sensitive Stomach lamb and rice formula, Annamaet Extra were all named, and one person mixes Earthborn Grain Free Lamb with Orijen Six Fish.

Most people do not give additional vitamin supplements, although Nutri-Vet Plus, Eye Caps, Vitamin C, SeaMeal by

Solid Gold, Vitamin E and Vitamin D were noted by a few.

About 50 percent of the respondents do supplement with oils. Some listed a brand (e.g., "Longevity" by Springtime, Inc., "Complete" by Dogzymes, "Gro-Hair" by Dogzymes and "Omegease"). Most simply noted that they do add salmon oil, fish oil, krill oil or coconut oil for healthy coat and antioxidant properties.

Also mentioned were Inflight coat supplement, Nupro powder, Bene-Bac, Nature's Farmacy Cornucopia and Show-Stopper.

When it comes to adding "extras" to kibble, a few people didn't alter it at all, but most people did. Additives were all over the place! One person alternates Primal Duck Formula Nuggets, Small Batch freeze-dried duck and canned mackerel as a kibble topper.

Here are some of the other items mentioned: Fresh Factors yogurt, Bragg's ACV, bee pollen, eggs, vegetables, fruit, yogurt, cottage cheese, poultry, meat, cranberry caps, kitchen scraps, Nature's Variety Raw Lamb Patties, Milk Bones, home-cooked food, Dogzymes Ultimate, Dogzymes Digestive Enhancer, Dogzymes Gro-Hair, pumpkin, raw chicken, pork and beef, canned fish, cooked cod or salmon, apple cider vinegar, cooked carrots, summer squash, and/or green beans, fresh blueberries, raw extra virgin coconut oil, glucosamine, Glyco-Flex I and III, Bug Off Garlic and Resveratrol.

After reading through this extensive list, I've decided to purchase a two-month supply of Grizzly Salmon Oil and see if there's a noticeable difference. (I have already switched foods to Diamond

Naturals and am extremely happy with my dogs' appetite for it and improved energy level!

Those Lovely Locks

Next pattern. I have used #1 All Systems shampoo for the better part of 20 years, followed with a conditioner (usually Crown Royale, but it's run the gamut), and a daily comb-through of Ultra Phix for dogs being shown. In a conversation with a handler-friend who has campaigned top specials, she said that she found #1 All Systems to be too drying if used weekly and recommended I try some other shampoos. But which?

The shampoo used by the majority of respondents was #1 All Systems Super Cleaning and Conditioning Shampoo, which was no surprise, but a number of other possibilities surfaced. These included Groomer's Edge Ultimate (which I've been trying on a couple of my dogs), Dynamic Duo Shampoo, Cindra, Mad About Organics Oatmeal shampoo, BADA-Bing Shampoo, Pure Shot, Pure Paws H2O, Grimeinator, Plush Puppy, Pro-Line Fair Advantage. Even a couple of human products were mentioned, including TRESemmé and Pantene Classic Clean. There were also Isle of Dogs No. 16 White Coat with evening primrose oil, Earthbath Eucalyptus & Peppermint Shampoo and Chris Christensen.

"Nobody is fooled in the end. Faults you hide now will show up again in future generations."

Conditioners chosen were also diverse, but nearly half of the responses said "None," and another significant number indicated that the conditioner was part of the shampoo they used. Traleigh Ultra Phix, Pro-Line Pro-Gro, Bio-Groom Super Cream, Isle Of Dogs Light Conditioner, Pure Paws, Thick N Thicker (used as a conditioner), Earthbath Oatmeal & Aloe Conditioner and Chris Christensen were mentioned. I remember back in the day I used Cholesterol once a month, letting it sit on the coat for 20 minutes before spending an hour trying to rinse it out.

More people used sprays of some

sort, although the product choices were diverse. Nature's Specialties Fluff & Puff Remoisturizing Spray, Crown Royale Bodifier, Ashley Craig leave in, Ultra Phix, Plush Puppy, Pro-Line Pro-Gro, Crown Royale Magic Touch Grooming Spray, Magic Touch finishing spray, ShowSheen, Nature's Specialties Silk-N-Finish Leave-In Pet Conditioner Gel, and CC Silk Spirits are all contenders.

I was a little disappointed that the Panagenics products weren't listed by anyone, because I am really intrigued with them and would like to know how they perform on a Golden's coat. I think I'm going to take the plunge and buy the Triple Set to see how it works.

Da Herbs & Da Drugs

Several years ago, when I was studying toy breeds in hopes of finding a more compact dog to show, I purchased a copy of "Cavalier King Charles Spaniels," by John Evans. Published in 1990, I was surprised at the blend of "old thinking" with what I perceived as "new thinking." The section of the book that really grabbed my attention, however, was 20 pages on herbal supplements and holistic treatments. Not only are there recommendations of herbs for specific medical conditions (e.g., mixed vegetable tablets for incontinency), there are also herbal treatments for behavioral issues (skullcap and valerian root to relieve ring shyness, for example) and for improving coat (wheatgrass oil or cod liver oil).

The survey asked whether people have seen or used stimulants, depressants or herbal remedies to change the behavior of a dog in the show ring. Thirty-five percent said yes; the other 65 percent had no personal knowledge of herb/drug use. That surprised me. Some of my earliest experiences working with a handler included watching her feed a half tube of Nutri-Cal to dogs going into the ring, and I knew of several people who had their perfectly healthy dogs on Soloxine (a thyroid medication) to grow coat. I also watched exhibitors push caffeine down their dogs' throats. Yet 65 percent of the people responding had no knowledge of it? I must be hanging out with some rough trade.

The majority of those who said they did have personal experience were adamantly opposed to the practice. Just a few of the many responses:

"I used caffeine once, years ago. I

would never do it again."

"I have seen Benadryl used to take the edge off a dog. Have personally never used it"

"I have seen Ace used. I do not support using pharmaceuticals to control behavior. I would retire the dog from showing first."

"I've seen Ace, caffeine and pain relievers used ... not a fan."

And my favorite:

"Crazy stuff happens with an eye on success in the show ring. I've become ambivalent to nearly everything but certainly make a mental note regarding any breeding ideas. If an alteration is causing the dog stress or suffering, then I'm all about altering the human instead."

The Color Purple (or Blond, or Red)

Back in the day, there were interesting reports, from reliable sources, that a top-winning dog was routinely dyed the same color as the handler's hair. A two-fer! I was even given the basic recipe at one point, and tried it out on my very red dog. It gave him blond highlights, but it was immediately apparent to me that it didn't make him a better dog. I never did it again, and he still finished with three 5-point majors.

I wondered, however, if that was still going on. The question posed was: *Have you personally, or have you seen, the color of a dog altered for the show ring? In your opinion, how strict do you think a judge should be as far as color is concerned? Are shampoos or rinses that "enhance" color different than actually dying a dog?* For the most part, the respondents felt pretty strongly about changing the color of a dog. Again, respondents were adamantly opposed to dying a dog but less concerned about enhancements with shampoo or rinses.

"No. I think a judge should be very strict if the dog's natural color has been altered. I think shampoos that 'enhance' color are probably just a sales gimmick and would not be the same as dying the coat to alter the color."

"I know of older dogs being dyed to cover gray. Don't consider rinses the same. They just brighten and enhance."

"I saw a dog of my breeding that was out with a handler altered. She dyed the dog's face because she was starting to grey at an early age. I felt it looked very distorted and didn't even look like her. Depends on what 'enhance color' means. If it changes the coat color, I would say it's not different. I would think if a dog has been dyed, they should be excused by the judge."

"I do not use anything to alter a dog's color, though I have touched up a nick with a concealer that I use on myself."

"I've seen people use powdered makeup to cover a gray face plus change one dog lighter or darker depending on the judge."

"I have not personally altered the color of my dogs but yes, I have seen this practice in many breeds. I do believe that the color of a dog can be an issue with a judge. I believe as long as the color falls within the breed standard the judge's personal opinion should not be a factor in his judging but we know it does. Especially with a dark golden. I do not feel that color enhancers change the color and make it more vibrant."

"A well known special was being colored several years ago — the dog was nearly totally gray on his body after being campaigned with another well-known handler previously. The dog's coat looked like an old woman's bad home dye job; it was clearly obvious and the coat was in terrible shape. By that point, the dog was not doing much winning. I have to think that really poor dye job and coat condition had a lot to do with it."

"I have seen people use magic marker on nose and I have seen people coloring their faces. I think this is the same as dying a dog and is a lie and false presentation."

Two of the respondents said they had dyed a dog and that it didn't bother them when people did it. I think it's sad that this is how a dog would be judged, especially if you are adjusting the color for a specific judge's preference. I think I'd just not take that dog to that judge. What about you?

Noses, Tails and Teeth — Oh My!

The AKC regulation states: A dog which has been changed in appearance by artificial means, except as specified in the standard for its breed, may not compete at any show and is to be disqualified. (*Rules Applying to Dog Shows*. New York: American Kennel Club, 2015;46-47. Available at: www.images.akc.org/pdf/rulebooks/RREGS3.pdf). A dog is considered changed in appearance by artificial means if it has been subjected to any type of procedure, substance or drugs that have the effect of obscuring, disguising or eliminating any congenital or hereditary abnormality or any undesirable characteristic, or anything that improves a dog's natural appearance, temperament, bite or gait.

"Hiding flaws and imperfections is not fair to those who are personally invested in breeding better dogs. It affects future generations, for the better or worse."

Nearly 20 years ago, I had a fellow breeder call me out of the blue and rip me a new one because I had allowed my stud dog to be bred to a bitch who had knee surgery. This was a huge shock to me — first because I looked at her clearances and thought she was good to go on that front; second because I didn't even know knees were a thing, let alone a genetic issue. Later, when I became involved in Newfoundlands, I learned that cruciate injuries are indeed genetically linked; but at the time I had no idea. The resulting conversations carved a huge chasm in my relationships with the bitch owner and the irate breeder, which have never been repaired. Let's just say I began asking a lot more questions of bitch owners as I moved forward.

The point is that this surgery should have precluded her from being shown — but they showed her anyway. It did serve as a teaching tool for me, and I decided that I would never knowingly breed to a

dog or show a dog that had been operated on to change a physical defect. It didn't matter whether it was entropion or a gay tail, I didn't want it at my house.

I wondered, however, if I was in the minority (again) and asked the following question:

How seriously do you take the AKC regulation? Would you ever show a dog who had a procedure for its health that also impacted appearance (e.g., umbilical hernia repair)? What is your feeling about people who straighten teeth, repair flaws in structure or gait through surgery or other medical intervention, lower tail carriage, etc.? Do any of these procedures, which happen every day, concern you?

Apparently I am not in the minority!

"I take it very seriously. I do not feel it is right to implant artificial testicles, straighten teeth or artificially alter the appearance in some other way for the purpose of hiding a genetic defect. I do not feel repairing an umbilical hernia has anything to do with hiding a genetic defect. It does concern me, but I have not personally encountered anyone who has done such alterations."

"Take this rule seriously. If a flaw is due to an accident and the dog is not being bred, I'm not opposed; but I am opposed if the dog was born with the flaw and it is trying to be hidden."

"Seriously. If it did impact the appearance I would not show the dog. The last sentence does concern me. It affects the breeding down the road of these animals — you don't know what faults you are breeding into. You are not bettering your breeding stock, or conforming to the standard of your breed. You are damaging the breed!"

"I do not think that a dog who requires a medical procedure ('requires' being the operative word here) should be disqualified from the conformation ring (eg., hernia repair). However, I also think that allowing certain medical procedures but not others would open up a huge can of worms. Plus, how would one define 'medical necessity' and who would make that decision? Thus, I think the regulation should probably remain the same. Unfortunately, the regulation is

Conformation Conversations, continued

not enforced and, therefore, is rather meaningless. As for me, I rarely use products (even the ones listed above), and do not do 'elective' procedures to alter my dogs' appearance/structure, etc. I do trim my dogs in a manner to enhance their appearance, and I do blow them out (most of the time) before going in the ring."

"Nobody is fooled in the end. Faults you hide now will show up again in future generations."

"My foundation bitch had a supernumerary incisor removed from her jaw before I purchased her at seven months. I unwittingly found out about this when she was two from the breeder's daughter. I was furious and withdrew her from showing, as I knew she had been altered. While not a major health issue, the same recessive gene that is responsible for missing teeth is responsible for extra teeth. I have had to be very careful to ask about this issue when choosing stud dogs, as it is not something that disappears in a generation. I think that the people who are altering dogs for show purposes are fools — they may be fooling judges and others for the win, but in the end what do they have for their breeding program? A dog with a fault who is going to produce that in their get. I have spoken out about this extensively and it is not popular when you confront people about altering/lying about their dogs. Gay tails are particularly aggravating when you breed to a dog and find out after the fact the tail was fixed when you have an entire litter with gay tails. Apparently winning is more important than breeding healthy and correct dogs for many people. This issue disgusts me so badly I have decided to stop showing because the show ring is no longer about breeding healthy, correct dogs — it is about winning at all cost, in any manner you can."

"I have a bigger problem with stud dog owners that do these things and deny it to bitch owners."

"I think fixing something like an umbilical hernia, which can be caused by traumatic birth is not a problem. I did have surgery on a dog many years ago that chipped an elbow in a fall. The chip was removed and the dog went on to

compete very successfully in obedience. He became an OTCH/UDX10. He was never bred. Yes, it does bother me when tails and teeth are fixed. If I, as a breeder, was looking for a stud dog and I also had these issues in my own pedigree, I think it is unfair to be 'hiding' these things, so I possibly would be doubling up on a trait that I am trying to steer clear of. Sad that it is all about winning at any cost to the betterment of the breed!"

"I personally take this very seriously. I am not going to fix something cosmetically just to show the dog and then breed it. I am very concerned about fixed tails and what it is doing to our breeding stock since so many people are doing it, which means we are breeding it more and more."

"I might show a dog with an umbilical hernia that had been repaired (never been in that situation though). Would consider showing a dog with a filled tooth. Otherwise, anything that would alter the natural conformation of the dog is not something I would entertain. Fixed tails, fixed bites, entropion surgery — all would give a false representation of the dog and I am not comfortable with that."

"I have a slightly different feeling on health concerns which were/are created by the activity level of a dog and purpose of a dog. Dogs used in field, agility, and obedience are more likely to require chiropractic adjustments and other forms of therapy to correct damage occurred while working. Most field dogs need help with their backs. You could make the point that this is improving a dog's movement, but it is unrelated to structure. But dogs who have had surgeries to correct hereditary or randomly occurring (non-working dog) issues — absolutely need to be disqualified. This covers everything from teeth to feet."

There were dozens more quotes (I'm sorry I don't have the space to print them all), which all echoed similar attitudes. The sincerity and passion people have for this issue is inspiring, and I hope that more exhibitors open their eyes to the fact that the show ring is not just about you personally making a champion. It affects future generations, for the better or worse. Hiding flaws and imperfections is not fair to those who are personally

invested in breeding better dogs.

I gave people some room to write any additional comments they had. Most noteworthy were:

"It is frustrating to hear some exhibitors complain and/or ask for help when the reality is they aren't investing the time and effort in their dog's coat. Some coats are stick straight, some are not. Both likely require weekly but different attention. Too many exhibitors cut corners and complain, rather than investing the time and reaping the rewards."

"Another one more specifically related to showing — a lot of people try covering up an undesirable coat (curly) by using hair irons and drying coats/slickers. To a certain extent, I think a more honest presentation of the dog is helpful, particularly as a more easy care and wash and go coat is preferable to one that is so curly that it's basically an open coat."

And this one, which is certainly worth consideration and discussion all by itself, and is a great way to end this article.

"I completed the survey, but I have to say that I am much more likely to question the ethics of someone who ignores the hemangio propensities in their pedigrees, heavily linebreeding on dogs who have died early and attempting to prevent owners from adding date and cause of death to k9data than I am to worry about someone I saw coloring a dog's coat. That person might be one and the same, and if so I will have all the more the reason to stay away from that stock, but the one crime has much greater impact on the health of our breed than the other."

I could not agree more. ❖

16. FOR BREEDER JUDGES ONLY: Which of the following do you find challenging? (check all that apply)

Answer Choices:	Responses:
• Maintaining friendships with people whose dogs I probably won't ever put up.	27.27% (3)
• Judging dogs without considering strengths or weaknesses in the pedigree.	18.18% (2)
• Putting up the best Golden, as opposed to the one that looks like it's the best to spectators because of grooming and handling.	18.18% (2)
• Putting up an exhibitor that I have no respect for.	9.09% (1)
• Putting up a friend, even though I believe they have the best dog in the ring, knowing that I'll be bad-mouthed for it.	18.18% (2)
• Not being swayed by dogs that are being heavily campaigned in magazines or social media.	9.09% (1)
• Not rewarding the dog of a breeder judge who has previously put me up at a different show.	0.00% (0)
• Figuring out exactly what is acceptable as far as social media and/or relationships with other breeders is concerned.	9.09% (1)
• None of the above.	27.27% (3)

15. FOR BREEDER JUDGES ONLY: Do you think that commenting on Facebook about a friend's brags or other dog photos is appropriate?

Answer Choices:	Responses:
Yes	87.50% (7)
No	12.50% (1)

In Conclusion

We are all products of our own personal experiences and make ethical judgments based on those experiences. Nevertheless, an open dialog helps people come together and at least have insight into the opposite point of view.

One of the respondents alludes to that perplexing place where a lot of exhibitors find themselves. *"Very interesting survey. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this and love the topic as there is a big division like never before between breeder judges who put up their friends and a certain type versus all-breed judges who put up handlers and the 'generic show dog.'"* That seems like a rock and a hard place to me, if you show and breed dogs not in favor with the current slate of breeder judges, yet not the "Hollywood style" Golden who

dominate the Group ring. Could this be another reason that entries are dropping off? I really believe that it is.

One empathetic respondent adds, *"I think it is sad that a judge would have to worry about anything but judging dogs and that exhibitors would even question a judge's decision because of what they personally think, when some of them don't know enough about the quality of the dogs to understand that a judge has put up the best."*

In a conversation with a friend recently, he made the point that instead of complaining about a judge or accusing them of being corrupt, you should look at the dog that just won and ask, "Is that a good Golden Retriever? Did the dog have great qualities that should have been rewarded?" I like to think that we could all be a bit more understanding of

each other and reel ourselves back to putting the quality of the dogs first and our own disappointments (if we are exhibitors) or friendships (if we are judges) second.

Raising the bar of integrity in our sport could make a real difference in entries and improve our enjoyment of the ring. Personally, I think it can happen. Do you? ❖

If you are interested in participating in future surveys, or if you have ideas for surveys, please send a note to conformationeditor@gmail.com. Future surveys will cover a broad range of subjects and your voice is most welcome! Your name will not be used in any article and all responses will be held in complete confidence by the author.