

Health Testing of the Great Swiss Mountain Dog

By Sue Brailey

email: smbrailey@tiscali.co.uk

Following on from the article on eye testing the next test is often hips. If your dog is going to be either sedated or fully anaesthetised to have the hips tested you may as well do elbows and shoulders at the same time. Many vets will just sedate the dog for x rays but some still prefer to fully anaesthetise the dog due to the positioning required for the x rays. Always seek out a vet experienced in these x rays as positioning, either good or bad, can affect the scores. The dog must be over 1 year but the ideal age to have a large dog x-rayed is around 16 - 18 months of age when the bones should be fully grown. As the dog gets older normal wear and tear will show on the joints which means the scores may be worse than if done when the animal was younger.

The vet will require the KC Registration Certificate for the dog and the dog must be micro chipped, (as from 1st April 2016 all dogs must be micro chipped by law anyway). The vet will fill in forms for hips and elbows (shoulders are not recognised in the UK so need to be sent abroad for scoring) and you will be asked to sign them. Each dog can only be scored once under the BVA scheme and once submitted the score cannot be changed (unless you appeal which costs £100). The current BVA cost of scoring hips and elbows together is £114. On top of this will be the vets charge for taking the x rays and sedation which can be anywhere from £250 - £750. This is another good reason to shop around.

The current BVA/KC scoring scheme for hip dysplasia (HD) has been in operation since 1984 and since then over 100,000 X-rays have been assessed. Dysplasia means abnormal development, and the degree of hip dysplasia present is indicated by a score assigned to each hip.

The hip score is the sum of the points awarded for each of nine aspects of the X-rays of both hip joints. The minimum hip score is 0 and the maximum is 106 (53 for each hip). The lower the score the less the degree of hip dysplasia present. An average (or mean) score is calculated for all breeds scored under the scheme and advice for breeders is to use only breeding stock with scores well below the breed mean score. The mean score for GSMD's in the UK is currently 8.5 (combined score) this is very low compared to most other breeds therefore dogs with a higher score than this can be used for breeding. Any score under 15 (combined) is good. A dog scoring slightly higher may still be used for breeding so long as it is mated to a dog with a lower score. However a score in the 20's (combined) should not be bred from unless the dog is exceptional in all other areas.

Below is a current comparison chart of USA and Europe scoring but is a guide only

Table 1. OFA comparisons of Hip Schemes (grade/score for both hips combined)

OFA	BVA	FCI		SV
USA	UK & Australia	Europe		Germany
		Old	New	
E (excellent)	0-4	A-1	A normal	Normal
G (good)	5-10	A-2		
F (fair)	11-18	B-1		
B (borderline)	19-25	B-2	B almost normal	Fast Normal = Near Normal
M (mild)	26-35	C	C	Noch Zugelassen = Mild Dysplasia
MOD (moderate)	36-50	D	D	Mittlere = Medium
S (severe)	51-106	E	E	Schwere = Severe

So far in the UK we have mainly good scores with one or two exceptions. With continued screening of all breeding stock we hope to maintain this high standard within the breed. At present here in the UK, HD scoring is purely optional. However most reputable breeders are conscientious and participate fully in the health testing that is available. This is the best way forward at present and who knows, maybe in 20 years time, all GSMD's may be free from HD and no dog will have to suffer the pain and discomfort of hip dysplasia again. How wonderful would that be.

Anyone wishing to breed should source a puppy from low scoring parents. Do not be fooled by breeders telling you their dog/bitch has been health tested, always ask to see the scores so you can make an informed decision.