

Schipperke health

BY IAN MILLAR

The Schipperke is a robust, hardy little dog with few health issues.

Given the ‘natural’ conformation of the Schipperke breed, there are no problems arising from its basic structure and most live active, healthy lives into their teens. Three conditions are sometimes found in the breed, but it must be stressed that none is common: mucopolysaccharidosis (MPS IIIB), epilepsy and Legg-Calve Perthes disease.

MPS IIIB is a degenerative neurological condition that is lethal and results in an affected dog being euthanised before its fourth birthday. Symptoms emerge between two and four years of age and include muscle weakness, tremor and loss of coordination. There is no effective treatment. The illness is hereditary, but fortunately, transmission is due to a mutated recessive gene and there are tests available at several laboratories now. The Schipperke Club maintains test result registers on its website, and while there have been some carriers in the last 15 years or so, there have been no affected animals in the UK to our knowledge. It is safe to say that breeders now seem to have this issue under control.

Epilepsy occurs occasionally in the breed, in most cases in a relatively mild form. The club participated in a longitudinal study being

conducted by the University of Helsinki, which has yet to produce final reports. Dogs with mild epilepsy can often be treated with medication and can live good quality lives. Since any hereditary component of this condition is not clear, epileptic animals should not be used in breeding.

Legg-Calve-Perthes disease is primarily seen in smaller breeds of dog and is a degenerative disease of the hip ball-and-socket joint, resulting from disrupted blood flow to the bone, leading to cell and tissue necrosis. There is associated pain and lameness, and if untreated, there can be significant inflammation and arthritis. Surgery is effective and the prognosis is good if rehabilitative therapy is followed. There may well be a hereditary element to this disease and affected animals should not be bred. It is relatively rare in Schipperkes.

In recent years, another condition has become apparent – von Willebrand’s disease, a bleeding disorder where normal clotting does not occur. There have been some affected dogs – in most cases, fortunately, asymptomatic – but this is a serious, life-threatening condition and breeders are strenuously encouraged to test for it. Again, a recessive gene appears to be responsible and

knowing a dog’s von Willebrand’s status is imperative if breeding is being contemplated.

In a minority breed such as Schipperkes, the gene pool is obviously restricted and close breeding from animals with common ancestry can easily give rise to new problems. At any given point, the breeding population is inevitably small, and discarding carriers, while it might be the instinctive reaction, can compound matters significantly. With reliable testing facilities available, the judicious use of carriers on clear-tested mates is a matter breeders need to explore thoroughly to help preserve genetic diversity. Breeders should remain mindful of the complete health of potential mates, as well as temperament and avoiding high inbreeding levels, to continue to keep this a healthy and robust breed.



Three Schipperkes keeping their teeth clean on dental chews.
Karen Bugg©

ASSURED BREEDERS SCHEME

Further information can be obtained from The Kennel Club Assured Breeders scheme department.

Email: abs@thekennelclub.org.uk or call 01296 318540.

Breed-specific requirements and recommendations including health screening for the Schipperke under the Assured Breeders scheme.

Breed	Requirements for health screening of breeding stock Last updated Dec 2020	Recommendations for health screening of breeding stock Last updated Dec 2020
Schipperke	None	DNA test – MPS IIIB