

DALMATIAN HEALTH & WELFARE DEAFNESS

Dalmatians are one of a number of breeds of dog which can suffer from congenital deafness in one or both ears. As the name suggests, the condition is present at or shortly after birth, and is generally understood to be linked to a white coat.

Fortunately, there has been available for a number of years now, a clinical test - known as a BAER test - which can determine the hearing status of a puppy (or adult) in each ear individually. It is the **only definitive and reliable test**, and should not be confused with any other test. It is available at a number of recognised testing centres, distributed throughout the country.

HOW COMMON IS DEAFNESS IN DALMATIANS?

Dalmatians may have hearing in both ears (bilateral hearing), one ear (unilateral hearing/unilateral deafness), or in neither ear (bilateral deafness). A Dalmatian with unilateral hearing enjoys a perfectly normal lifestyle, which is not impaired in any way by its hearing status. Nor does its unilateral deafness imply that it has any increased risk of losing the hearing in its other ear. However, it is strongly advised that such Dalmatians are not bred from. By selective breeding, it has been possible to reduce the incidence of deafness. Current UK data indicate that about 4% of Dalmatian puppies are born with bilateral deafness, and about a further 14% have unilateral hearing.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF DEAFNESS?

Scientific research has clearly demonstrated that the incidence of deafness, both unilateral and bilateral, is reduced by breeding only from dogs and bitches which have been BAER tested as having bilateral hearing. Quite simply, **DO NOT BREED** from any Dalmatian which has impaired hearing. It is by following this criterion that responsible breeders have been able to reduce the prevalence of hearing impairment, and hope to continue to do so. Research continues into the genetic mechanism of congenital deafness, but this is a very complex subject, and a short term answer is not likely.

HOW CAN I TELL IF A DALMATIAN HAS BEEN BAER TESTED?

The results of **every** BAER test are issued to the owner (or breeder) in the form of a certificate showing the hearing status of each ear individually and unambiguously. The certificate will bear the signature of a representative of the testing centre, and the official heading of that organisation. If you are told a puppy's hearing status, but a BAER certificate is not available, then you should not accept any claim as to hearing.