THE SHEER JOY OF BREEDING A FILA LITTER
BY
STAN HOPGOOD

I suppose it all really began nearly three years ago, when I bought a dog to go for walks each day. By accident, I purchased a Fila Brasileiro, and by chance I put him on a dog show, and by luck (at this moment I am not sure whether the luck was good or bad) he won his class. This led to more shows, and rather surprisingly, more wins, so, almost two years ago, I bought a bitch, who when entered in shows did at least as well, and sometimes better than my male.

Lady, as I call my bitch, came into season for the third time, and by accident, one hectic day, of which I seem to have more than a fare share, Duke, as I call my dog, got together with her, I saw nothing happen and hoped they had not mated, Lady was just two years and three days old, but some four or five weeks later, my worst fears were confirmed and Lady was pregnant. I put her onto rich puppy food, wormed her, read all I could find about whelping, and pestered Lady´s breeder and the vet, almost to death.

On Wednesday January 10´one of my wife´s peacocks apparently decided to commit suicide, and suddenly flew over the fence into the dogs area of the garden, seeing some 50 odd kilo´s of

Fila rushing towards it, followed by another 50 or 60 kilo´s waddling in the same direction, the peacock changed its mind and took refuge on the roof of the house, where in spite of varied attempts to dislodge it, it stayed until almost dark, and then flew off towards the woodland. Searching after dark, failed to find him, another search next morning, produced the same result, so advising the neighbours, it was posted missing, presumed dead.

About 4 a.m. Sunday the 14´ I was awakened by Lady, this being the 61´ day of pregnancy, I dressed and sat with her until around 8 a.m. when I decided that it was false alarm, and we continued as normal, about 6 p.m., the same day and feeling very tired having been up since very early, I decided that a hot bath, followed by a couple of hours T.V. would be relaxing. I had no sooner submerged myself when Oliva called that two boys had seen the peacock and that she was going to try to catch it and may be some time away. I completed my soak, looked in on Lady and called her to come with me into the kitchen, where I decided that a pot of tea would not go amiss. I had made the tea and was reaching for a biscuit when there was a strange quiet “Plop” sort of sound, Lady was on her feet, and there behind her was a pool of dark liquid seeping into the carpet and a black sausage thing in the middle, Oh no, it can´t be, I had just been telling her that she would be another two days before she had her babies. I dropped the biscuit tin, picked up the strange object, Lady was now licking it, how warm it was, quick, into the whelping room, rushing with the pup in one hand, keeping Lady off with the other, and trying to turn over the corridor Turkish carpeting with my feet as we ran.

In the “maternity ward” rubbed the pup dry, is it breathing? Yes, its dark grey, must be a rat, it started “mewing” Oh God, she´s having kittens, look at the clock 7.35 p.m. weigh the pup 525 grams, female, brindle I think, put her back with her mother, Lady pushing it hard with her head, why aren´t there anymore? Be patient, might be two hours, check everything ready for

the hundredth time, respirot, oxytocina, blunt scissors, toweling, absorbent paper, the list is never ending.

A tap on the window, Oliva my wife had returned, and seen the light in the labour room. I´ve got Hassan (the peacock), chuck him away, I´m having pups, no that's wrong Lady´s having them.

9.30 p.m. Lady strains, another arrives, Lady hardly seems to notice it. Quick, open the sack, hands wet and warm, pick an opening at the head, now Lady starts to eat the remains, rub the newcomer dry, it's a male 525 grams again, Oliva is down caressing Lady, keeps repeating, poor Lady, you are suffering, poor girl, how you suffer.

9.55 p.m. another female, 500 grams. Oliva still murmuring to Lady, I tell her for goodness sake shut up, if you can´t do more than that, leave us alone, off she goes in a huff, I know its my fault, but I cannot leave to say sorry

10.57 p.m. the second male, only 450 grams, don´t panic, over 400 is alright,

11.14 and they are coming fast and furious, this will soon be over, another female, down to 425 grams.

Midnight, Lady snoring and pups mewing, I can get that pot of tea, Oliva not about, but see light coming from under bedroom door, so I know not asleep. Took tea into labour room, time to look at babies, Dear Lord they all have pink on their noses, that´s disqualification, calm down, think, don´t panic, pigmentation comes later, they will be alright, no they won´t look at their tails, they are so long, they are collies, no didn´t I read that the body and the head grow quicker than their tails, I forget

1 a.m. its Monday I think, no contractions, but must give oxytocina if no pup appears for two hours.

1.15 two hours have passed, prepared and gave injection, clearing up, whoops 1.22 a.m. and another female, help break sack, cut cord this time, rub hard to dry, weight 525 grams again.

1.45 a.m. the third male, and the smallest yet, only 400 grams, come on girl, lets have the rest, and we both shut our eyes.

3.oo a.m. still waiting, how ugly the pups look, offer Lady water and food, not interested. I make another pot of tea, scared to bring in the whisky in case I get drunk and fall asleep.

3.45 a.m. no pups for two hours again and no contractions so gave another injection of oxytocina, this will bring them on, Lady stood up, she strained, laid down, moved around, I continually poking the puppies against her.

7.40 a.m. phoned vet, she said not to worry, might just as well have told me not to breath, gave Lady some warm milk and egg yolk.

9.10 phoned vet again, she asking more questions, again, not to worry, I am not worrying, just going mad.

10.00 a.m. gave third oxytocina, for no pups for over 8 hours.

10.10 a.m. passed big pup 600 grams male hind-feet forward and dead.

10.20 a.m. gave more warm milk and egg yolk.

11.00 a.m. again phoned vet, everything alright, according to her, this view not shared by me.

12.08 p.m. Good Lord, its afternoon already, and another female, 550 grams, the largest live pup yet.
12.35 p.m. more egg yolk and milk.

1.00 p.m. phoned vet, conversation much the same.

1.43 p.m. a female 350 grams and very weak. Now has given birth to 10 pups with 9 living.

3.45 p.m. oxytocina this being the fourth injection.

3.50p.m. passed a placenta, hooray, cheers, its all over, well done girl, but why are you still so fat.

3.57 p.m. came the answer, a male, dead, hind-feet first, 425 grams. Lady went out with Oliva (now back in favour) and urinated.

6.10 p.m. phoned vet yet again.

6.20p.m. Lady ate nice portion of her food mixed with chicken and broth.

6.45 p.m. another dead male, yet again hind-feet first, I had to help extract, 450 grams.

8.30 p.m. I gave Lady warm milk and sugar.

9.30 p.m. phoned vet, not in, spoke to her husband, had to recite the happenings over the last 26 hours he said “not to worry” no pasa nada, the Spanish favourite phrase, and one which frightens me to death.

At 10.10 p.m. Lady had large drink of water, and at 10.15 p.m. I again spoke to the vet, everything going to plan, Hells Bells not my plan, for sure.

Took shower and shave, something substancial to eat, and went back to maternity to discover at 12.10 a.m. (another day, not possible) but it was, and to my grief, Lady was lying on one of the largest pups, it was quite dead when I extracted it. I gave fifth oxytocina injection, almost immediately at 12.15 a.m. she strained like mad and I helped to remove another dead female, hind-feet first 400 grams.

12.40 a.m. another this time live female, 425 grams.

13 births, four stillborn and one squashed, still 9 alive.

2.10 a.m. straining hard, obviously very uncomfortable, shall I phone vet? By now I know the answer, no pasa nada, so why bother, I feel nearly dead myself.

3.00 a.m. another very tiny female only 300 grams, please God, that's the lot. 10 live puppies is enough for anyone. I dozed off I guess for discovered with a start that at 5.20 a.m. one puppy was separated from the family and felt very cold, massaged it for all I was worth, not very much by now, put it to a teat, seems O.K.

7.50 a.m. I again dozing in lounger chair, Lady left bed and before I could gather my wits, went to toilet in corner of room, "Phew" what a stink, Settle down Lady, go for mop and bucket Stan, How peaceful the night outside, how bright the stars, back to work, changed room smell to one of disinfectant.

8.15 a.m. mixed warm milk, egg yolk, touch of sugar (my idea for strength) and some food.

8.50 a.m. spoke again to vet, more or less same conversation, so at 9.10 a.m. phoned Ines van Damme, Lady´s breeder, got a load of sound advice, felt comforted.

9.20 a.m. gave small dose oxytocina.

9.30 a.m. Oliva took Lady to toilet, urinated, and Oliva rushed back to tell me, I was cleaning up, that Lady dropped a pup in the garden, dashed to fetch it, still in sac, broke it open, rubbed it with towels, have respirot, but completely forgot it so probably my fault pup was dead, another 400 gram female.

9.45 a.m. Lady ate breakfast about half normal amount

9.53 another dead male passed feet (hind) first 550 grams, and though I did not know it then, this was the last.

16 births, six dead and ten living.

At 10.09 a.m. passed a placenta.

10.15 a.m. I spoke again to Ines.

10.21 a.m. more afterbirth passed

10.30 a.m. now convinced the end arrived, I phoned Angela, Dukes breeder, to give the news, she heartily congratulated me, I am afraid that I was not so enthusiastic.

10.55 a.m. spoke to vets assistant, (don´t know how many bean make five, that one, took course in stupidity and failed)

11.45 a.m. Lady had some broth and little dog-food, followed by a huge drink of water.

12.00 p.m. Lady out to urinate

12.27 p.m. Lady plomped herself down on another babe, pulling her off it, sweating like mad, don´t think it will live.

12.40 p.m. gave Lady some warm milk and sugar.

12.55 p.m. Lady panting strongly, respiration appears to be about 200 per minute, Please God, I don´t lose her, take temperature again, thermometer is in Fahrenheit, brought from England, formula won´t come to mind what on earth is it, steady Stan, subtract 32 multiply remainder by 5 and divided by nine. Hell nearly 39.5. Phone vet. Naturally, not to worry, it´s a lack of calcium, give her some. Rush back to maternity, put calcium tablet down Lady´s throat, luckily she easy, also not breathing so rapidly now.

9.35 p.m. Lady again out to urinate.

9.30 p.m. Oliva sitting with litter, I for rest

12.30 a.m. Last born very weak, tried artificially feeding her and the squashed one

4.15 a.m. the above two still crying, all others apparently asleep.

8.30 a.m. Last born died. Continued in room observing everything feeding lady and pups until at 10.30 p.m. the squashed babe died in my hands, I am distraught, I really have tried, and I cannot blame Lady, how cruel is the natural world, decimating the weak, and favouring the strong.
Spoke to Ines and gave Lady fosfocina.

As I write this in the nursery as I now call the ex whelping room, labour room and maternity ward. Comfortable smell of disinfectant. Lady snoring as she used to, an occasional mieeuw from a pup, but most asleep.

What an experience we have been through, 60 hours and more have passed. Panic and pain, worry and wishing, jitters and joy. One thing that's stand out clearly in my exhausted mind, is the tranquility that came to me on those occasions during the long nights when I stepped out onto the terrace and looked uo into the heavens, there was no cloud and little moon so I saw clearly the brilliance of the stars. I found in those times a moment of refreshment, and shall name the pups Stans Sarlet, or Starburst etc. etc.
Do people actually do this for a living? A breeder is either a brave dedicated person and as such to be admired, or else quite mad, and as such to be pitied.

Stan Hopgood
1995

(Mr. Hopgood is an English gentleman, living in Galicia, Spain)