

The Whole Point Is to Produce Puppies

So Why Risk Losing Them?

Part 1

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The whole point of breeding is to produce live pups that will survive and thrive. An obvious statement yes, but it bears repeating. The POINT is to produce live pups! As breeders we spend untold hours, money, and effort planning for our litters. With AKC Scottie registrations down by 38% over the past 10 years, we cannot afford to lose any of these valuable puppies. Some will not make it no matter how hard we try, but there are things we can do to tip the balance in our favor for success.

This article will present some basic but vital points. Many successful breeders already employ some or all of these practices. Many long time breeders could write a book containing a wealth of information based upon their experiences. We will hear from some of them in Part II of this article at a later date. But for now, it is my turn, and I believe the points below are paramount.

1. First of all, you need a team and a game plan! Your family, fellow breeders, and mentors are important members of your team, but your veterinarian is a key player. A vet who understands what a breeder is trying to accomplish is a true blessing. Very simply, you will not be successful without a vet who is dedicated to helping you produce healthy pups, and who is also willing to learn about our breed. Part of your game plan should be a pre-breeding consult with your vet where you can discuss all aspects of this project: pre-breeding exam and blood work, ovulation timing, and your planned method of breeding (natural service, AI, or surgical implant). A critical part of this consult will be a discussion of how your vet will respond in an emergency. You will need on-call or emergency contacts, and you will need to discuss safe C-section protocols. The point is, without the support and skills of your vet, you are fighting an uphill battle all the way.

2. Due Date- This is an easy one. If you did your progesterone tests to time the breedings, then you know when your bitch ovulated. Ovulation occurs around 5 ng/ml in nearly all bitches. So her due date is 63 days from ovulation. Not from the first breeding. Not from the second or third breedings. From ovulation! You can circle that day on the calendar and get ready.

3. Timing of C-section- Free whelping Scottie bitches make our jobs easy! But things don't always go so smoothly. Let's say you have been taking your bitch's temperature twice daily for 7 days before her due date. The temp has now dropped by a full degree from the previous 12-hour reading. Take the temp again in 6 and then again in 12 hours to see if it is staying down or has dropped further. You can expect labor to be underway within 24 hours of the lowest temperature reading. However, if you do not have active labor 24 hours from the lowest reading, and the temp is heading back up, *something is wrong!* If your vet is not sure about the timing, he or she can always do a progesterone test to make sure the level is back down to 2 ng/ml or below. This will tell you that the pups are ready to be born, and a C-section can be safely performed. If the bitch has already gone into labor but has been bearing down hard for more than an hour with no progress, pack her up and head to the vet! There are many causes for uterine inertia and dystocia, and we can lament the rising number of C-sections in our breed at another time. But the POINT right now is to get live pups on the ground.

4. Anesthesia- C-sections are scary enough without worrying about which drugs to use. Since you have a vet who is a key member of your team, and since you have already discussed the protocols ahead of time, your team is ready! These days, it is inexcusable to risk the lives of the bitch and/or her pups by not following the safest protocols. Recommended anesthetic protocols for C-sections are well outlined in the literature. They are discussed by reproduction specialists at veterinary medical conferences. They are covered on Internet veterinary sites and in presentations by experts like Myra Savant Harris. They are published in ScottiePhile Health Library on the STCA website at www.stca.biz. This information is readily accessible to all, and it will save lives.

5. Resuscitation- Barring any pups with congenital deformities or pups that died before birth, normal Scottie pups delivered from a well-timed C-section should be strong, vocal, and on the move. Cleaned and dried, with their airways cleared with a bulb syringe, these babies should be ready to nurse even before their mother is fully awake. A drop or two of a glucose solution on the tongue will light the flame in newborn pups and give them that extra energy to hang onto the nipple for colostrum. Stimulating the pup to dribble urine on the dam's nose will provide all the right smells as she wakes up. Most of the time, she will start licking her babies right away. Make sure your vet has arranged for a quiet spot in the vet clinic where you can stay with the bitch and her pups until she is ready to go home. Remain with your bitch and talk to her. Your very presence will calm her and help her bond with her pups.

6. Gram Scale- Do you realize that there are 28.35 grams in one ounce? Do you realize how much critical weight a neonatal Scottie puppy may have lost before it even registers on a scale that reads only in ounces? The very first indication that a puppy is in trouble is lack of weight gain or loss of even a few grams from one 12 hour reading to the next. Weighing the pups twice a day for the first week or two of life on a **gram scale** will monitor their health and alert you to any lurking trouble. Don't even think twice about this one. You need a gram scale!

7. Tube feeding- This is a lifesaver for puppies and is an essential skill for any breeder. Whether you are giving glucose solution or Pedialyte or puppy formula, the act of tube feeding may save a puppy by effectively delivering the needed energy and nutrition for survival. You cannot do the job with an eyedropper, a baby bottle, or a sponge in a puppy that is too weak to suckle. I would venture to guess that more neonatal pups have been lost due to lack of essential nutrition than from the accidental placement of the feeding tube in the wrong spot. Yes, tube feeding is scary and should always be done carefully. Yes, if you accidentally deliver the liquid into the lungs, the puppy will not survive. But here is an easy test: After you have inserted the tube but before you empty the syringe, squeeze the toe on a puppy. If you hear a squawk while the tube is inserted, you are safe. If there is no sound, the tube may be in the lungs. Pull out and reinsert. Never deliver the fluid until you hear that indignant squawk! Note: Take the bitch out of the room the first few times that you tube her pups, just in case she doesn't take too kindly to the process! Ask your vet, or vet tech, or experienced breeder friend to show you how to tube a puppy. There are books and videos to describe this process in detail, but nothing is better than being guided by an experienced person. Tube feeding is critical and can make for a happy ending for a pup that is teetering on the edge.

8. Heat, used judiciously- Dr. Robert Hutchison once quipped that he could save more puppies in this country by taking a pair of scissors to the cords of all the electric heating pads used by breeders. His point was we tend to go overboard with heat, cooking the pups and making the bitches miserably hot. Of course we all know that pups do not have competent heat regulation in the first couple of weeks of life, and a chilled puppy is in trouble. But have you ever sat and really watched the newborn litter and their dam when all is going well? The pups spend their entire day on, under, or right next to the bitch's soft and toasty warm belly, sleeping, nursing, sleeping and nursing. Her metabolism is in full gear and she is kicking out enough heat for all of them. Sure, we need to have a small heating pad in the box or a lamp overhead, to provide supplemental heat when needed. But keep in mind that with a 70 degree ambient temperature in the room and a snug whelping box warmed up by the bitch's own body heat, you may not need to crank up that heat source as much as you think! Don't be a slave to a number on the thermometer in the whelping box. Watch the bitch and her pups, and learn from them.

Part II will feature a breeders' roundtable to learn from the people who have been successfully producing puppies for years and are willing to share their Top Tips with the rest of us.