

# INFORMATION IS POWER: The Berner-Garde Foundation Database

By Nancy P. Melone, Ph.D., Editor, *The Alpenhorn Berner-Garde People* ID#: 11955  
[nancymelone@mac.com](mailto:nancymelone@mac.com)

To make informed decisions about improvements in the longevity of a breed, the genetic robustness of a stud dog, or the prospects for a healthy puppy from a particular litter/breeding, researchers, breeders, and prospective puppy buyers need good information. Today's Berner owners, breeders and researchers are fortunate because in 1995 a group of progressive individuals established The Berner-Garde Foundation, including its informational resource, the database. This concept of a centralized, computerized informational resource containing breed health data was well ahead of its time and has progressed beyond its initial vision to become the model for many other breeds.

Importantly, The Berner-Garde database offers value to many different groups. For prospective puppy buyers, it offers a way to evaluate the health of ancestors and relatives of a litter from which one may be purchasing a puppy. Such information is important in assessing the likelihood of various health problems associated with a particular breeding and the puppies coming from it. If breeders and past puppy owners have been conscientious about inputting health information regularly on their dogs (both good and bad information), the database offers a puppy buyer one of the better and more comprehensive resources for making litter/puppy health predictions and puppy buying decisions. In addition to standard health certifications (OFA, CERF, etc.) found in other databases, the BGF database contains disease diagnoses, pedigrees, titles earned, breeder, owner and other health-related information. For the breeder, the database serves as a valuable tool for investigating the health and reproductive history of prospective stud dogs and their offspring. For those concerned with breed health advances, the database offers insight into emerging health issues and diseases/defects that may require additional

study or funding. Upon request, researchers may be given access to the records for their research studies. For example, the BGF database was an important starting point for identifying dogs diagnosed with intrahepatic portosystemic shunts (IHPSS) by Dutch researchers who are attempting to isolate the gene causing liver shunts in Bernese Mountain Dogs.

Like many things of value, good information is not free. It takes investment—in this case, it takes an army of dedicated Berner owners and a bevy of honest breeders who conscientiously and regularly provide data about the health of their dogs. It's easy to think that breeders and show dog owners bear the major responsibility in this effort. That assumption would be wrong. The majority of dogs produced by Bernese Mountain Dog breeders are pets (not show dogs), hence the average pet owner plays a critical role in the creation and maintenance of this informational resource. Indeed, one might say, pet owners are the largest and single most important group of potential contributors to such breed health databases. All groups are important



Photo: N. Melone

from the perspective of the knowledge that we gain. For example, rescue dogs make up another important subset in that they can provide information that can help us determine the long-term effects on dogs of rescue stress, multiple placements or less than optimal beginnings.

You might wonder why dogs that will never be bred (i.e., "just pets") are so important to the database? The answer is that the more information one has about ALL the dogs produced by a stud dog or

dam, the more accurate predictions will be about the likely health of future progeny. Comprehensive and complete information allows breeders to make better breeding decisions to maximize the likelihood that their breeding goals will be achieved. This same information can also aid puppy buyers.

As you take time to explore the database, you will see that it has a number of search possibilities for breeders. One can search by people, dogs, litters, and vets. From the home page, click on “database”, then click on “click here to access the database as a Guest”. On the left of the page, you will see a list of search attributes (people, litters, dogs, vets, reports, dog photos, submit data, and log off). These are short cuts for searching the database or entering or editing information on your dog. For example, you can click on “litters” to find all the litters that a particular person has bred over time. Another interesting search tool is the “report” function. If you click on “report”, you will see a series of predefined reports that you can obtain. The predefined reports include health query, certification/test query, trial pedigree, stud book query, owner report, breeder report, kennel name report, offspring report, dogs by title/award query, and rescue dog query. The “offspring report” is particularly valuable for breeders. If you own a dog or bitch that has been bred, click on “offspring report.” You are given two report choices—a brief report or a full report. These reports are a wonderful convenience for a breeder’s record keeping. Give them a try. If you have other ideas for useful reports, please contact Pat Long or Gary Galunus at [www.bernergarde.org](http://www.bernergarde.org).

A quick way to check on the completeness of your dogs’ records is to click on “owner report”, enter your

BGF ID number (you don’t remember it, you can look it up easily by clicking “lookup”), and the data for all your dogs will be listed in a nice printable report. By using this report feature you can easily check if you need to update any of your dog’s records. If so, take time now to do it. We all need your information.

A database is only as good as the data contained in it. By logging on to the Berner-Garde website ([www.bernergarde.org](http://www.bernergarde.org)) and clicking on “submit data” (on left side of page), any Berner owner or breeder can quickly create a new entry for their dog or update an existing dog record. As the dog matures, new information can be added using this same online method. When a dog crosses the rainbow bridge, it is important for you to enter that information, too. If you are not comfortable with online data entry, simply print out the form, fill it out and mail it into one of the data operators (for a list of operators, click on [www.bernergarde.org/dataoperators.aspx](http://www.bernergarde.org/dataoperators.aspx)).

One of the fun aspects of the database is your ability to include a picture of your beloved Berner in his or her database record. Click on “Dog Photos” to learn how to do this. Again, you can do it yourself or mail the photo to Berner Garde and they will do it for you. To see an example, click on “dogs”, enter 22587 in the “Berner-Garde Dog ID” box at the bottom of the page. You will see the data record for my BARC rescue, Sophie Tucker who recently crossed the bridge. Click around on the labels on the gray bar to see what type of information is stored in a complete record. Now, click on “Photo” on the right hand side of the gray bar—Voila! A picture of Sophie with her white fu Manchu whiskers!

*Please take the time now!  
Contribute to this valuable resource!*

*“Leave a legacy”  
for all prospective puppy owners,  
Berner owners, breeders and researchers  
to use now and in the future.*