

Meet Your Breeders!

John Forbes -- Baagna Basenjis, Australia

1. How did you get started in Basenjis?

I was born in South Africa, and my family were breeders of German Shepard's, Fox Terrier & Rhodesian Ridgebacks. I was involved in junior handlers but lost interest at about 16 as I found other past times. I immigrated to Australia in 1972 and decided within the year, that I had to have a dog. I bought an Old English sheepdog male, thus commencing my show career within Australia in 1973. In the same year I inherited my first Basenji, I showed the male for a friend as a baby and he decided that he owned me. The Basenji took over my life and became my major breed.

2. Why did you start breeding? When?

I actually breed a litter of Old English before I started breeding Basenjis, but they became the love of my life. As it turned out my first basenji was not really a show dog and it became obvious that if I intended to stay in the breed I need a good bitch. At the time the Afrika lines [Mrs Marie Dymock] were very sound but in some cases felt a little more elegance was required, I also liked the elegance and heads of the Pukkanut lines [Alan & Lauris Hunt]. As it so happened, Marie had a litter from Ch Pukkanut Zyper and Ch Afrika Ambassador and I fell for one of the bitches and so became the proud owner of Ch Afrika April Showers who in turn became my foundation bitch. I then acquired my first male Ch Janir El Dorado and this pair became the foundation of what is Baagna today.

3. What persons influenced you most strongly?

In my early years I spent a lot of time with the two people who helped and tried to steer me in the right direction, these Marie Dymock - Afrika Kennels and Lauris Hunt – Pukkanut Kennels. Over the years, I learnt a lot about the balance of Type versus Soundness as both women placed a different emphasis on different points and as I developed in the breed, my focus changed to what it is today. I believe that the eternal question within all dog breeders around the world is still, "which comes first Type or soundness" and I learnt so much from these two breeders.

4. What have you seen improve in Basenjis over the years?

In the early years, we had a big temperament problem and aggressive Basenjis were very common and the improvement in this area is wonderful; it has always been a big part of my breeding program. Size has also improved as many of the early dogs tended to be too tall and heavy. Eyes and tail set have also improved over the years, but I feel that the light eye is creeping back into our dogs.

5. What do you think today's Basenji breeders need to pay special attention to?

The biggest problem is that I feel that we are losing type; the short backed dog high on leg is becoming hard to find. Short upper arm and short forelegs are just too common within the modern basenjis. Because

of the judge's love for fast moving dogs, be it correct movement or not; Basenjis, are being bred much longer in back, than the standard calls for. I have listened to many people who claim our standard contradicts its self, wanting a short backed animal with a swift long tireless swinging stride. I have judged all over the world and finding the correct movement is very difficult. I realise that we all have different ideas on movement, but when you see a short backed basenji moving correctly, it is 'like poetry in motion'. Here in Australia, we need more shelf and darker eyes. Some of the heads are also becoming very snippy and lack the chiselling.

6. What advice do you have to a new breeder getting started?

Talk to lots of breeders and form your own opinion, but never be afraid to ask for help. When you breed a bitch, make sure the bitch is worthy of the breed. You need a good bitch, stud dogs are not able to produce wonderful, from ordinary bitches. Remember you cannot blame all the faults on one parent.

7. What dogs have you owned, stand out as outstanding examples of the breed and why?

I have owned a few dogs that have been big winners in the show ring, but for breed type, three dogs stand out in my mind. The first being Ch Baagna Hustler, who not only proved his worth in the ring with BIS and BISS to his credit, but also sired over 40 champions during his life, the last litter at the age of 14 years.

He was a very square dog, long upper arm and foreleg, with a deep rich red coat and one of the best male heads I have ever owned. He was a very smart mover with a strong top line and a natural head carriage. Being super critical, I would have liked a longer neck and a shorter coat.

The second was his grand daughter Ch Baagna Lyka Hussey, and a winner in the ring, with BIS and BISS wins to her credit. She also produced 12 champions from her four litters. She had a classic head, high set ears, with lovely fine wrinkle and dark eyes. She was also very square with a good front and well-angulated hindquarters and a strong top line, excellent tail, set and shelf. A very strong mover, possibly too strong in hind, but could move gracefully holding her top line and a high head carriage. Whilst she had lovely shoulders I would have liked a slightly longer foreleg, something that I feel the breed has lost today.

The third being Grand Ch Baagna Virst Topaz, who also a big winner in the ring, with BIS and BISS to her credit. She has produced four champions, with the New Zealand boy getting his Grand Championship. She produced her last litter last year and the puppies are doing very well in the ring. She was my ultimate type with a head that typifies the breed. Small ears, fine wrinkle and an expression that said I am here! A strong top line, a high tail set with a good shelf and moved around the ring as if she owned it, giving the ultimate picture of grace and elegance that our breed should have.

I have had many dogs that I feel have been good representatives of the breed, the above three stand out in my mind. My young dog Ch Baagna Alpha Check, I am campaigning now is also the type that really appeals to me, being an excellent mover, with a short back, long foreleg, and a good head.

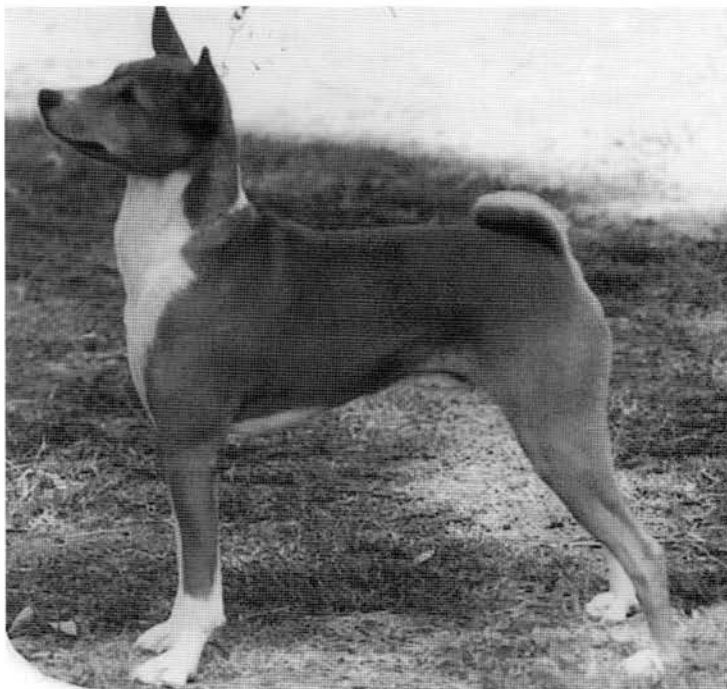
8. What do you feel are your most significant achievements with the breed?

When I started in Basenjis some thirty years ago, we had a big problem with temperament and whilst I have been attempting to improve the breed standard, good temperament became a large part of my breeding program. I have spent many years, breeding for good temperament without making the dog's timid just very friendly and laid-back dogs that are suitable to any family. I do believe that I have made a big difference in the temperament and it always humbles me, when other breeders acknowledge the wonderful temperament I have achieved in my kennel.

9. Anything else you would like to say?

My breed type has always been the similar, but the Baagna head is well known all over the world, for the lovely dark eyes and excellent pigment. My males head is a bit heavier than other kennels, but when you see my dogs, it is very easy to tell the males from the females.

I would like to finish this profile with a big thank you to *The Basenji* magazine for giving me this opportunity to express my thoughts and ideas on the breed. I have dedicated my life to this wonderful breed, which has helped me achieve a very happy and full life. Now that I am an All Breeds judge, the breeding side of the basenji will take a back seat, but I will never be without a basenji in my life, as life without is not a life. ♦



CH Baagna Hustler



CH Baagna Lyka Hussy (5 months)



CH Baagna Alpha Check



CH Baagna Lyka Hussy