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A Selection of Tail Damage Letters



This tail damage could have been avoided

Tail Docking is in the interest of the pup

Just click on the breed to get straight to the first letter:

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Dear Sir

Manorrog Miss Matty was born on 2nd April 1994 and came to me at six months old. She had a fine full tail and looked beautiful with it when she carried it proudly like a flag, waving and wagging. However beautiful it may look, it was soon obvious to me that the practicality of docking was not a case of cruelty if docked, but cruelty not to dock.

After her initial obedience training and some success at country fairs in scurries and tests we began serious work in September 1995 on a major partridge shoot near Grantham. Even on the first day her tail became cut working in tall maize. As the season progressed and Mattys experience grew we moved on in October to pheasants and we worked in the beating line on two major local shoots. We also worked on rough shoots on disused railway lines around this part of Lincolnshire. These heavily overgrown areas caused havoc with her tail and it soon became apparent that I will have to have her tail removed, a risky operation at her age involving a full anaesthetic.

I had an open mind about docking when I took Matty. Now I am convinced never to have a full tailed spaniel again. The cruelty is not in docking, but in not docking. The enclosed photograph of her battered tail and a bloodstained dog are proof of this.

Matty worked probably three days a week on average through the season and I appreciate this is more often than many dogs. The point is that she had an unnecessary problem brought about by not being docked. It is my intention to work my dogs as least as often as this again this coming season, however, should I use Matty? The evidence is plain: Matty worked alongside many other dogs, not just mine, and no others had damage similar to hers.

I hope this evidence is of some use to you. Please feel free to use any photograph in any way you may wish.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Leach

Colsterworth Lincolnshire



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Boxers



Dear Sir,

I'm enclosing a letter to let you know that my first litter of Boxer pups, we had them just after the ban came in for tail docking, we had seven pups, two went to my children and I kept one, the other four were sold.

My son's dog and the one we kept had long thin tails, when they got excited they hit everything my son's burst the end at about nine months old, they tried all kinds to get it to heal, but nothing worked. In the end it had to be cut off shorter than it would have been docked. My own bitch also burst hers at about fourteen months, but after the trouble my son had with his, our vet took our's tail off when it didn't heal, after the first lot of tablets.

We don't know about the other four, but it is not very good odds when two out of three have had to be operated on which causes a lot of pain and upset for the dogs when it can be avoided.



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Yours sincerely,
Mrs Jackson
Penrith

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Cocker Spaniel

Dear Sir

Our cocker spaniel bitch Lucy was 14 months old and enjoying the experience of her first working season when the problem with her tail started in December 1996. Approximately two inches at the tip of her tail broke open leaving raw, bleeding skin. This was treated by the vet with cream and we tried our best to protect it (not easy!) for the next two months. Lucy was in obvious pain during this time and the tail would always break out whenever she was working and often when she was being exercised.

Eventually the vet recommended we have the tail amputated, which was done on 12th February 1997. This caused Lucy much distress over the next few days. She cried a lot with pain, was very reluctant to even walk and generally changed completely from the happy confident dog we knew. Eight days later she was back at the vet because the stitches were infected. The end of the tail was in such a mess, the stitches had to be removed early and she was back on antibiotics. The tail had to be bandaged for three weeks but eventually scarred over approximately one month after the operation. The vets bill was over 100.

Another member of our shooting syndicate had to have their springer spaniels tail amputated last year. Needless to say, I am no longer open-minded about this issue, believing now that it is cruel not to dock.

Yours sincerely

Kay MacDonald

Pitmedden Aberdeen

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German Shorthaired Pointer

Dear CDB,

I recall 2 pups from our German Shorthaired Pointers Rebel & Shorty (I now have Basenjis). The first girl was named Daisy & was from the litter of docked pups, & the 2nd pup was named Bertha (from the litter on undocked pups). Both of these girls were mine & I used Daisy for obedience & hunting; Bertha was used for hunting only. Altho I was only a child of 11 or 12 when the pups were born, they were *my* dogs, were trained by me (under parental supervision), & they accompanied me (& adults) into the field in the hunt. At the time, we lived in the countryside of Southwestern Michigan in the US & these dogs were pampered.

They dogs were quite active in the field, racing thru brush, thru swamp, thru forest & brambles. Daisy was nearly always unscathed, but Bertha nearly always had some sort of injury, especially to her tail. I clearly remember replacing tail bandages daily for the better part of the summer of '64. By the fall of that year, Bertha had shortened her own tail by quite a few vertebra. By Christmas vacation of that same year Bertha had reduced her tail to a bloody stump which had to be amputated close to her spine.

It was a horrible thing for a child to witness one of her beloved dogs suffering so. I had always wished Bertha had her tail docked as a young babe so that she would not have undergone so much torment. But afterwards she had fewer hunting injuries & seemed a bit more coordinated in the field. I would have to say that in that particular situation, tail docking would NOT have been for personal convenience, unless you meant convenience for the dog.

Yes, there are very good reasons why certain breeds are docked. My opinion is that if it is necessary for the breed to function properly without injury, then it is necessary.

This is my opinion, & it will not change.

Sandra S Anderson , US

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Boxer

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to relate the unfortunate experience of my 10 month old Boxer dog. Before getting Barney last January I enquired of you about puppies, you had some which would be ready in February. I almost got one from you, except that I was taken by surprise by the tail issue which I wasn't aware of. As I enquired about puppies from several breeders I was told that it was now against European law and would soon be totally illegal in this country to dock tails in puppies. These breeders were quite adamant in their feelings and I was persuaded that it was the right thing not to dock tails-after all they are born with tails so it seemed natural to keep them. I again rang you and asked whether your puppies had their tails and you said they were docked. You said there was a lot of evidence of tail injury in those dogs who kept their tails-I wish I had asked you to expand on this point. It seemed to me a silly argument as other dogs have tails after all, so I decided to go for a puppy with a tail.



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As I write this my poor Boxer is lying at my feet feeling very unhappy having had his tail docked yesterday due to injury. He had to have a general anaesthetic of course and he has had a very unsettled night, not being able to settle comfortably (likewise so have I as I had to stay with him) He had such a long and very strong tail and kept whacking it against the walls, furniture, radiators etc. etc. that he made it bleed badly and thereafter it never healed because every time he got excited he opened it up again. Boxers, as you know, being so excitable and exuberant as puppies are difficult to control, when anyone calls at the house they want to greet them and make a fuss. Barney would do this even though he made his tail bleed badly every time. I spent more time wiping blood from the walls every day recently than doing anything else! we hoped it would heal but the vet felt there was no chance and for his own good he recommended amputation. In fact my vet is one who would only do this if it was absolutely necessary, so there is no cosmetic influence involved in his decision.

I felt compelled to write to you, as Secretary of the Scottish Boxer Club, to say that I feel the nature of the Boxer is such that a tail is a dangerous thing for them to have. Other dogs could not do the injuries to their tails that the strength of the Boxer can inflict. I feel that this aspect is far more important and more likely to influence the law than the argument concerned with the looks of the dog.

Actually Barney had a nice tail with a white tip and one becomes accustomed to the look of the dog with a tail-but the safety factor is of utmost importance.

Yours most sincerely,

Mrs. D K Lunt, Peebles, Borders Region

Scotland

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English Springer Spaniel

Dear Sir

I acquired Pip, my English Springer Spaniel as a five month old pup last November. He had not been docked, and my shooting friends on seeing him all remarked on his tail length and warned me to keep an eye on tail damage.

When I approached my vet, he said that the only way the tail could be amputated was for medical reasons. I even produced my shotgun certificate to show that I didn't just want the tail docked for the sake of it, and that I only wanted about a third off to stop him catching it, but the vet told me to bring him back if his tail became damaged, and to pay the consultation fee on the way out.

Shortly afterwards I noticed a small scab on the end of his tail, and over the next couple of days it became worse. I could see that as he wagged his tail it was bashing hard against everything in sight, and when it became red raw down one side I decided to revisit the vet. He agreed to amputate the end of the tail under a general anaesthetic. Pip wore a trumpet collar for ten days, when the vet advised me that it could be removed, but the following morning on returning from dawn flight I was greeted by Pip bearing a ragged bleeding stump.



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Whether he had chewed the tail or banged it in the kennel I don't know, but again a series of visits to the vet followed. Poultices were applied, the vet found an abscess and advised me that further amputation was needed, with yet more suffering for Pip and expense for me. He has now been to the vet 11 times, had two operations under general anaesthetic and had more antibiotics than me.

I believe that had my puppy been docked straight after birth he would not have suffered in the way he did, and nor would I or my wife. All because of a bunch of do-gooders who are probably city dwellers and know nothing about working dogs or country ways and life.

Yours faithfully

Martyn Ball

Holyhead

Ynys Mon

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Boxer

My wife and I are recent members of the Council for Docked Breeds, having bred a litter of Boxer pups in October last year and having been frustrated at having been told by every vet in our area that docking was against their principles, we decided it was only fair to ask half price for the pups as they did not conform to breed standard.

We actually confronted our local vet with the information we received when we joined the Council, but to no avail, which is all the more surprising when you consider that most vets will happily remove a horse's testes without any qualms at the whim of any owner, a practise which in comparison to tail docking I found extremely odious and calls into question the hypocrisy of the "High minded" stance of veterinary surgeons. "High minded" in this case being a euphemism for cowardice.

I was contacted recently by Mrs Raine who had bought one of our pups. "Purdie" had damaged her tail by knocking it against the wall as she greeted them. They were unable to stop the bleeding, as every time they came home from work, the pup in her excitement would knock her tail against the wall and re-open the wound.

In desperation Mrs Raine took the pup to Gilmores, the Durham based vets who have a practice in Spennymoor, which by coincidence is the vet we had confronted earlier. The upshot was that the same vet who had refused to dock the pup initially, decided that she now had no option but to dock the pup's tail which if done in the first place would have saved the pup a lot of suffering and Mrs Raine a considerable amount of worry (and quite a bit of money too).

If you need to register this incident I will gladly supply Mrs Raines and Gilmores addresses etc.

Yours faithfully

Jack Waller



Co Durham

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Old English Sheepdog

Dear Sir or Madam,

In the past, when I bred and showed a terrier breed, all my puppies' tails were docked without so much as a squeak and no subsequent problems ever developed.

Three and a half years ago, my friend's Old English Sheepdog had puppies. After extreme complications, five died, leaving two female pups. The local vet refused to dock them, and as we live in remote countryside, we were reluctant to travel miles with the two remaining puppies which at that point were fairly weak and the bitch was understandably unsettled.

The breeder was keeping one pup as a pet and I was taking the other. As neither of us had any intentions of showing, we were fairly ambivalent about whether the tails were docked - until my bitch started experiencing problems at about ten months of age. She would run into the room with blood spraying from the tip of her tail which was damaged time and time again, simply because it was being wagged against walls and hard surfaces - and this is a placid bitch which spends its life indoors rather than in kennels. Each time the wound healed, the same problem would recur and she was often in discomfort.

Eventually the tail became so badly infected that the vet decided the only course would be amputation. We couldn't have agreed more - but instead of removing the whole tail while the bitch was under general anaesthetic, the vet would remove only the infected part, roughly a quarter of the tail. Several subsequent visits were necessary to check stitches, re-dress the wound etc.

What, pray, is to stop the whole thing happening again, and again? The trauma for the dog, not to mention the owner's wallet, is surely less when dealing with a tiny puppy which betrays no sign of discomfort than an adult dog which has to be subjected to a series of painful and distressing operations. Having seen the alternative to docking, I know which I prefer.

Hilary Bowman of North Yorkshir

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Hygiene Problems Do Occur

"Having owned Old English Sheepdogs for 30 odd years and being a professional groomer I quite often get my own breed in for clipping.

In recent years because of the docking situation I've had more and more in with tails and dew claws. It's not easy for pet owners to cope with the bobtail's jacket, but in several cases the presence of a tail hasn't



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helped, with the amount of coat, knots, felts and dog toilet making a huge lump in the rear. The fact a tail is present only helps the tangles and dirt to stick in one very uncomfortable lump.

I recently had to shave to the skin an OES found abandoned on a main road. The people who had so kindly given him a home and love him dearly had tried themselves to remove some of the huge lump on his rear and legs, resulting in quite a deep and serious wound. They were horrified at what they had done. Even for me it was no easy job, made harder by the presence of the tail. It was so felted I could only see the tip of the tail, the rest had somehow all intergrown with his back and bottom. What a state! It brought tears even to myself and I've seen some dreadful cases over the years.

What made it even harder was that this poor soul continually wagged his whole bottom and gave me his paw like only a bobtail can. The dew claws had also been left on. Both had grown so long they had embedded themselves almost an inch into the dog's legs. When I cut them and pulled out the cut nail it left deep open wounds. The new owners didn't even know what a dew claw was.

You can't help but wonder how many others are like this poor soul at this present time. A happy ending for him, but I'm convinced in my mind if he had not got a tail then his problem and smell wouldn't have been half as bad.

" Barrie M Croft, Scarborough

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Tail Damage in Undocked Breeds also occurs:

Dear CDB,

My black lab had to have a third of his tail docked a year ago from reoccurring "happy tail" He's a happy guy and wags his tail constantly and the tip used to beat against walls and doorways. The tip became excoriated and opened up, causing rivers of blood to fly all over the room as he wagged and wagged. It would heal up with lots of TLC and then open up again when the bandages came off.

The only solution was the tail amputation and even this did not go smoothly. He picked at the bandage and got the amputated tip infected to the point where it was almost gangrenous. Elizabethan collars did not keep him from chewing at it. What worked was a month of wearing a cervical type collar with lots of tail soaks and antibiotics. It finally healed, grew hair and looks kind of cute. Most importantly, he can wag and wag now without causing self injury.

I don't know what I would have done with Caesar (the black lab) if I didn't have the option of tail amputation. He probably would have died from gangrene.

Kathy,

Rochester, New York, USA.

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Greyhounds

In cats, where it has been studied fairly well, the natural bob tail is as I recall a heterozygous state for a gene that is lethal in the homozygote. From the point of view of cruelty I think surgical removal of tails by a trained technician in sterile conditions is a lot better than breeding for axial skeleton deformities so that a portion of dogs will have 'natural' bob tails.

After having a boarding kennel I think I have some additional insights into why bobbing began in some breeds at least. Dogs with short coats like boxers and greyhounds if they have a tail wagging personality and a long whip-like tail can easily damage the tail by beating it against the sides of their kennel stall or run. The stalls need to be at least 6 feet wide to prevent this in the average greyhound. In the days before antibiotics such injuries if they led to infection could be fatal so dogs of breeds that were kept kenneled may have been subjected to preventive docking.

We had to take in 6 greyhounds on an emergency basis and 5 of them bled their tail tips in the kennel within a few days. My house greyhound bangs hers up on the kitchen walls and we have had to teach her to sit as a preventive measure. Traditionally greyhounds are not kenneled in the same sort of runs that shepherds, etc are put in, but Boxers are and they are active tail wag type dogs so perhaps this contributed to the custom of tail docking

Bonnie Dalzell, M

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Gordon Setters

Dear Sirs

I write to let you know what a horrible experience it is for Gordon Setters to injure their tails. It happens often as a result of the tail wagging so hard, it is damaged as it hits doors, radiators, walls etc.

Firstly it has to be bandaged, plus dressing, which the dog usually manages to remove in no time. It sometimes has to be stitched, therefore the risk of anaesthetic. Our dog then tries even harder to remove dressings and stitches. Has to be muzzled or sedated. Does further damage to tail which necessitates having to have a part of the tail removed. More bandages, more distress. Sometimes infection

All in all, the whole experience is a nightmare for dog and owner sometimes taking two months to repair, often more. It is a painful, expensive time consuming injury which I am sure docked breeds do not have to suffer. Having a tail docked is absolutely nothing compared to the anguish of dog and owner when a tail is injured

Jill Dixon, Cheshire. UK

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Irish Setters

Dear Sir

I have owned, shown and bred Irish Setters. My only dog now is 10 years old has always suffered with his tail. This is mainly due to the fact that he is a very happy dog but beats his tail so furious that if it happens to hit anything, the tip starts to bleed.

This started when he was young and the tip of his tail is now hard and bald with scar tissue. At one stage my vet said he may have to have the tip removed. Thankfully we have not had to do this. In the winter it seems to get hard then cracks and bleeds and I have to keep an eye on it to stop it happening.

Also, if I go on holiday and he goes in kennels, I have to tell them not to be too friendly to him as this will start him wagging his tail and yes, bleeding. Luckily I know how to treat him and I can stop it getting worse, but I must admit that although Irish Setters are my favorite breed, my next dog will be docked breed.

It is so sad that I sometimes have to ignore my dog so not to excite him, just to prevent this from happening. If docking can prevent this from happening to any dog, then surely it should continue.

M J Clarke, Colne, Lancs. UK

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FENNEL'S STORY

Born in 1997, Fennel was the only liver (brown) coloured Curly Coated Retriever in a litter of 14. Of the twelve that survived, poor little Fennel found herself rejected by her mother in the first few days of her life, perhaps Mother knew what was to come!.

During her first visit to the Vets for what should have been just a routine check, the Vet discovered a heart murmur, which he described as sounding like "an old washing machine", with Fennel being given just a few months to live. One look at the lovely little puppy, that had fitted in so well made the decision to try and save her life a mere formality. Frantic phone calls followed, which resulted in a consultation at the Cambridge Veterinary College, which gave Fennel her one chance to live - a major heart operation.

In November 1997, she visited Cambridge for her initial assessment, this was followed by surgery two weeks later. The day of the operation, was one never to be forgotten, a nail biting experience where Fennel's future (if any) was held in the balance.

A week later after an amazing recovery, she returned home as a jubilant and enthusiastic puppy, sporting a furless body with a large scar. Never has such a welcome been so appreciated, as she was collected from the college, where she had become a special favourite with all the staff.

Fennel's recovery from such a major operation was remarkable, with the small brown puppy with the large





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scar rapidly maturing into a big strong retriever, each day providing further justification (if it were ever needed) for the decision to undertake her life saving surgery.

With her heart operation behind her, a long and trouble free life was hoped for., however little were we to know that further trauma was just two years away. Such a happy dog was Fennel, that her tail was always wagging, so much so that surrounding objects were never safe from her whip-lash wag.

The inevitable result was of course a split end to her lovely tail, with the frequent site of blood splattered all around the house. Whilst this is not unusual in this type of dog, with many animals suffering similar problems, but usually recovering within a couple of days, poor old Fennel had an added problem of infection setting in.

Further visits to the vet resulted, with several attempts to cure the problem, this eventually led to yet further surgery to remove the infected region, with around four inches of her proud tail having to be removed.



Thirteen visits to the vet to have the dressings replaced over TWO MONTHS and it was clear that the operation had not worked, with further infection setting in. An emergency visit on a Sunday morning to the vet was greeted with an instant judgement, that the infection had become very serious and urgent action was required. The next day poor old Fennel found herself once again on the operating table, the third time in her short life. This time for what resulted in a major amputation of most of her tail, leaving just four inches for her to wag.

The operation, which we mistakenly expected to be relatively minor, turned out to be anything but, with trauma setting in, and things looking really bad for what was once a happy and enthusiastic dog. Fennel had now been reduced to a distressed and very agitated dog clearly in a state of panic and probably great pain.

Recovery from this operation, was fortunately a much shorter period, and within a few weeks, Fennel was back to her old self, having adapted and accepted her new tail, wagging it enthusiastically for every one to see.





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Whilst Fennell has packed one hell of a lot into her first few years, and provided her with the reputation as being one of the costliest dogs in the area (all of her treatment was paid for without the help of any insurance cover), anyone that sees her now will agree that the money spent on her was well worth every penny.

The cost of treating her tail problems were as follows:



12 May 2000 - initial consultation & antibiotics	£35.37
16 May 2000 - surgery to remove 4 inches + medication	£128.85
13 visits between 16 May & 17 July consultations & dressings	£125.84
	+ medication £45.20
17 July 2000 - surgery to remove remainder of tail	£231.50
	+ medication £15.88
	Total £582.64

And of course the £811.23 for her heart operation - and no insurance - phew!

I would just like to add that although Curly Coated Retrievers are not normally a docked breed, I fully understand why the Council of Docked Breeds and its supporters, do not wish to put these 50 odd breeds at risk of enduring the same pain and suffering that Fennell has gone through.