



Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome - BOAS

On the 20th and 21st June 2023 an International Boas Conference was held in Oslo, Norway hosted by the FCI in cooperation with the Norwegian Kennel Club.

Present was 81 delegates from 15 different countries representing the Veterinary Profession, National Kennel Clubs and International Organisations, I attended as the representative of Atibox.

The boxer is one of the 24 Brachycephalic breeds and these breeds are amongst the most popular and highest registered breeds worldwide.

The aim of the conference was to inform and discuss the issues which face Brachycephalic breeds and to exchange knowledge and views about what control schemes are available and how the health of these breeds can be improved. It was recognised that to improve health matters discussions and cooperation from all the contributing partners was needed, that is Breeders, Veterinarians, Kennel Clubs, Judges, Health and Welfare organisations.

This report is compiled to inform the Atibox members countries of the discussions, it is a resume of the conference as I have understood and recorded it. It is not intended as a 'technical or veterinarian document' but it is my hope that it explains in terms which can be understood what was discussed.

Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome – BOAS is defined as;

a **pathological** condition affecting **short nosed dogs** and **cats** which can lead to severe **respiratory distress**. There are four different anatomical abnormalities that contribute to the disease, all of which occur more commonly in brachycephalic breeds: an elongated **soft palate**, **stenotic nares**, a hypoplastic **trachea**, and everted **laryngeal saccules** (a condition which occurs secondary to the other abnormalities).

The conference was addressed by acknowledged experts as can be seen in *appendix document 1*.

Professor Jane Ladlow from Cambridge Veterinary University gave a presentation on the BOAS Functional Grading Assessment scheme which has been developed and is now a recognised method of evaluating and grading Bulldogs, French Bulldogs and Pugs for BOAS. The grading for BOAS is

administered by trained veterinarians under licence from the Royal Kennel Club of the UK who has a signed contract with the FCI. The method of examination and grading criteria can be seen in *appendix document 2*.

At this present time there is not a BOAS grading system in operation for boxers, there has been in the UK an evaluation of boxers in respect of BOAS but this study is not yet complete, until all the data is evaluated, validated and published the outcome of the study is not known and it will not be possible to have a boxer breed specific grading scheme. It was stated that it is hoped this will be in the next year.

There was discussed various ways that all breeds can improve and what in general can be contributing factors with BOAS problems. I will now discuss these as I have understood them and how they can be applied to our boxer to improve the future health.

In respect of boxers, shortness of the muzzle is always sited as the major cause and yes this not correct or desirable but it is not the only or necessarily the main contributing factor. We need to pay attention to a number of possible contributing factors and start now to address them . All can have an impact on the breathing and functions of breathing, there is no definitive order of importance as the severity or not in individual dogs differs and so will the impact and how it effects the dog.

But, nostril size and the opening in the nostril size was stated as a primary contributing factor, so the suggestion was that improving this factor was a very good place to start. Indications of small nostril openings sited were;

- Respiratory noise when exercising
- Excessive snoring noise

Logically if you compact and or reduce the space available for the size of the airway be it by length of bone, tissue mass internally and or externally it may have an impact on the ability to breath normally. The factors discussed which can contribute to this were;

- Size of the openings in the nostrils - *see appendix document 3 for examples.*
- Width of the skull and the shape of the skull.
- Excessive skin / flesh on the skull and thickness of – externally and internally
- Length of the skull
- Length of foreface
- Depth of stop
- Size and thickness of the tongue
- Neck length and cleanness of the neck/ amount of excessive skin & flesh on the neck – externally and internally
- Body mass and condition
- Length of back

So for Boxers in the short term there is no validated test, it was emphasised that the tests used for the three breeds presently cannot be used for other breeds, although in general they are the same test there are differences and so they are breed specific.

For BOAS testing to continue to be credible it is vital and necessary that all breed specific testing is backed by proven science and data.

We can as a breed of course make a start and have a strategy for improvement in the breed, in fact this is essential to protect for breed the future.

Change will not happen in week's; improvement will take time but doing nothing is not an option.

An honest and open discussion within the breed needs to happen, cooperation between all parties and a conclusion reached on how improvement can be made for one aim the health of the boxer.

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