

MICROCHIPPING IS IT FOR YOUR CANINE FRIEND?

By Kathleen Dillon

You've heard about microchips, but you've got an ID tag on your dog's collar and besides, she's an indoor dog and there's no need to go to all the trouble of going to the vet to have this done. Right? If that's along the lines of your thinking or if you just haven't gotten around to it yet, I'd like to relate some incidences that I had personal experience with just within the last few months.

We are breeders of Epagneul Bretons and besides having our adult dogs permanently identified with microchips a few years ago we began to also microchip the pups we produce prior to them going to their adoptive families as a service to both the new owners and for the pup's benefit. Avid Microchip (A.V.I.D. stands for American Veterinary Identification Devices) has a program that allows breeders to chip dogs they own as well as the pups of litters they produce. Each chip number is automatically registered to that breeder. After the pup goes to its new home the new owner has the option of transferring the ownership record into their own names if they prefer. There is a very small fee which is good for life. However, if they choose to leave it as is, Avid will phone the breeder who can then in turn look up the chip number and contact the owner. I received just such a call this summer.

Roofers were busy working on a home in Texas and, unknown to the residents had left the gate to the yard open when they came onto the property. The dog needed to go out and the Mrs. of the home had obliged. Minutes later when she opened the house door to call the dog back in she found the dog had escaped through the open gate. They spent the rest of the day and night searching, to no avail. The next morning they put up missing posters in the neighborhood, at the local veterinary's office and some businesses in the area. Two days later they still had not been able to locate their dog.

Avid phoned and informed me that a veterinary clinic in Texas (which turned out to be 10 miles away from the owner's home) had reported to them that they had an injured dog in their clinic and needed to contact the owner. Avid gave me the chip number of the dog and the phone number of the clinic. With that information I was able to find the record of the chip number and the owner of the dog and I contacted the clinic. They informed me that someone had brought a dog into their clinic that had been hit by a car. Though it was in a lot of pain they were unable to administer any treatment until they got permission to do so from the owner. They had scanned the dog to see if by chance there was a chip implant and voiced to me how impressed they were with the efficiency of the Avid system. I was able to contact the owner within minutes and told him about his dog and where it was. The good news of this story is that the dog received treatment, was returned to its family and has mended well. One hates to think of what would have been the alternative end of the story if there had not been a microchip to aid in locating the owner.

In this next instance the owners had transferred the ownership records into their names and Avid had called them directly. The couple had hired a house sitter to tend to things and care for the dog while they went on vacation. Again it is another instance of an indoor dog escaping from the back yard. The sitter had let the dog out, the dog escaped and ended up in a shelter that only holds dogs for three days. The shelter scanned the dog and found that it was chipped, called the number into Avid and was given the owner's name and contact information. Needless to say the owners cut their vacation short and returned immediately to rescue their dog from the shelter. Another happy ending because the dog was reunited with its family, but without that chip the ending could have been a disastrous one.

Because we live in South Dakota and operate a pheasant hunting lodge, it is common for locals of the area to call us when they find a lost hunting dog. But besides the owner and dog getting separated, it has also been known to happen that unscrupulous people will steal a sporting breed dog from their area to take hunting out of state and when they finish their hunting trip they remove the collar and ID tag, if any, and leave the dog behind to be found by locals. Only too often there is no way to identify the dog's owners because of ID tags that were torn off by catching on something or purposely removed. When all other efforts fail to find the owners we work to find the lost dog a new, loving home. But it would be much preferable to reunite the owner and dog and much quicker and easier if there was chip information to aid in that effort.

Microchips are a tiny computer chip (about the size of a grain of rice) which has an identification number programmed into it. It is encased in a smooth, strong biocompatible glass and is small enough to fit into a hypodermic needle. They are implanted by way of standard injection like a vaccine is administered. Once a pup is injected with the chip it can be identified throughout its lifetime by this one-of-a-kind number. Its identification cannot be altered, lost or intentionally removed. The microchip is designed with an operating life of over 25 years and is guaranteed for the life of the animal. The chip requires no care and normally does not move around because connective tissue forms around it anchoring it into place. The majority of veterinary clinics and shelters across the country have universal scanners that can read either AVID or HomeAgain chips and they routinely attempt to locate a microchip when a dog that is otherwise unidentifiable is brought in. Your veterinarian will have the ownership information forms on hand which he will provide to you when you have your dog chipped by him. Chipping is a relatively inexpensive insurance policy that you really should not overlook or delay in procuring for the well-being of your beloved companion and for your own peace of mind.