



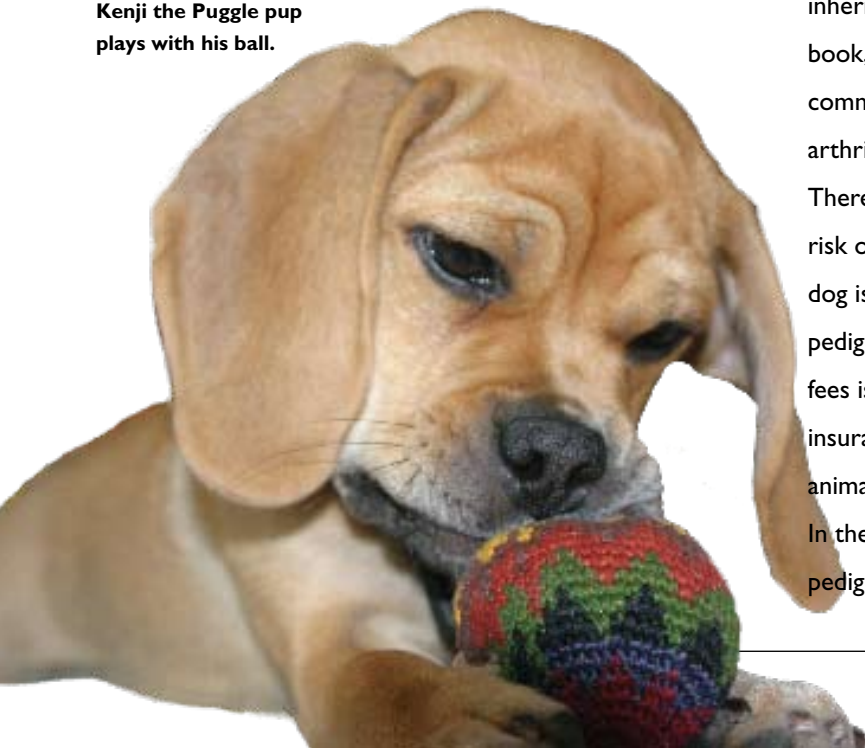
Designer Dogs

TV vet PETE WEDDERBURN looks at the latest crossbreeds with a difference.

A few weeks ago, I met an unusual looking puppy called Bouncer. He did not look like a normal crossbred dog, but he was definitely not a pedigree breed that I had encountered before. When I asked about his background, his owner solved the puzzle for me: "He's a cross between a Golden Labrador and a Springer Spaniel – a Labradinger." This was the first time I had met an example of the latest trend in the dog world, a designer dog.

Designer dogs are a phenomenon which started in the US, moved into the UK, and are now trickling into Ireland. A designer dog, also known as a 'dog hybrid', is a deliberate cross-breed between two pedigree breeds of dog with the intention of obtaining the best of both breeds. The resulting breed mixes have carefully coined names to add to their appeal

Kenji the Puggle pup plays with his ball.



with Labradingers, Labradoodles (Labrador/Poodles), Shih Poos (Shih Tzu/Poodles) and Puggles (Pug/Beagles) as examples.

The best of both worlds?

The theory behind designer dogs seems logical: if you mix two different pedigree breeds, you hope to produce puppies that have the best qualities of each of their parents and a lower likelihood of the inherited diseases that plague some dog breeds. The term 'hybrid vigour' describes the extra health and vitality that is hoped for. However the flip side is often forgotten and you can sometimes end up with the worst of both breeds!

Pedigree dogs have been bred from a relatively small number of individual dogs. As well as having the good features of their breed, pedigree dogs can sometimes suffer from certain inherited problems. If you open a standard veterinary text book, you will find a long list of the conditions that are common in pedigree breeds, including itchy ears, skin disease, arthritis, heart problems and liver disease.

There are testing schemes in place to try to minimise the risk of inherited diseases, but it is still true that a pedigree dog is more likely to suffer from health problems than a non-pedigree dog. The cost of insuring crossbred dogs for vet's fees is around 30% lower than of pedigree dogs, because the insurance company knows that they are lower-maintenance animals than their pure-bred cousins.

In theory, a designer dog is a 'half-way house' between a pedigree dog and a cross-bred dog and, if you are lucky, you

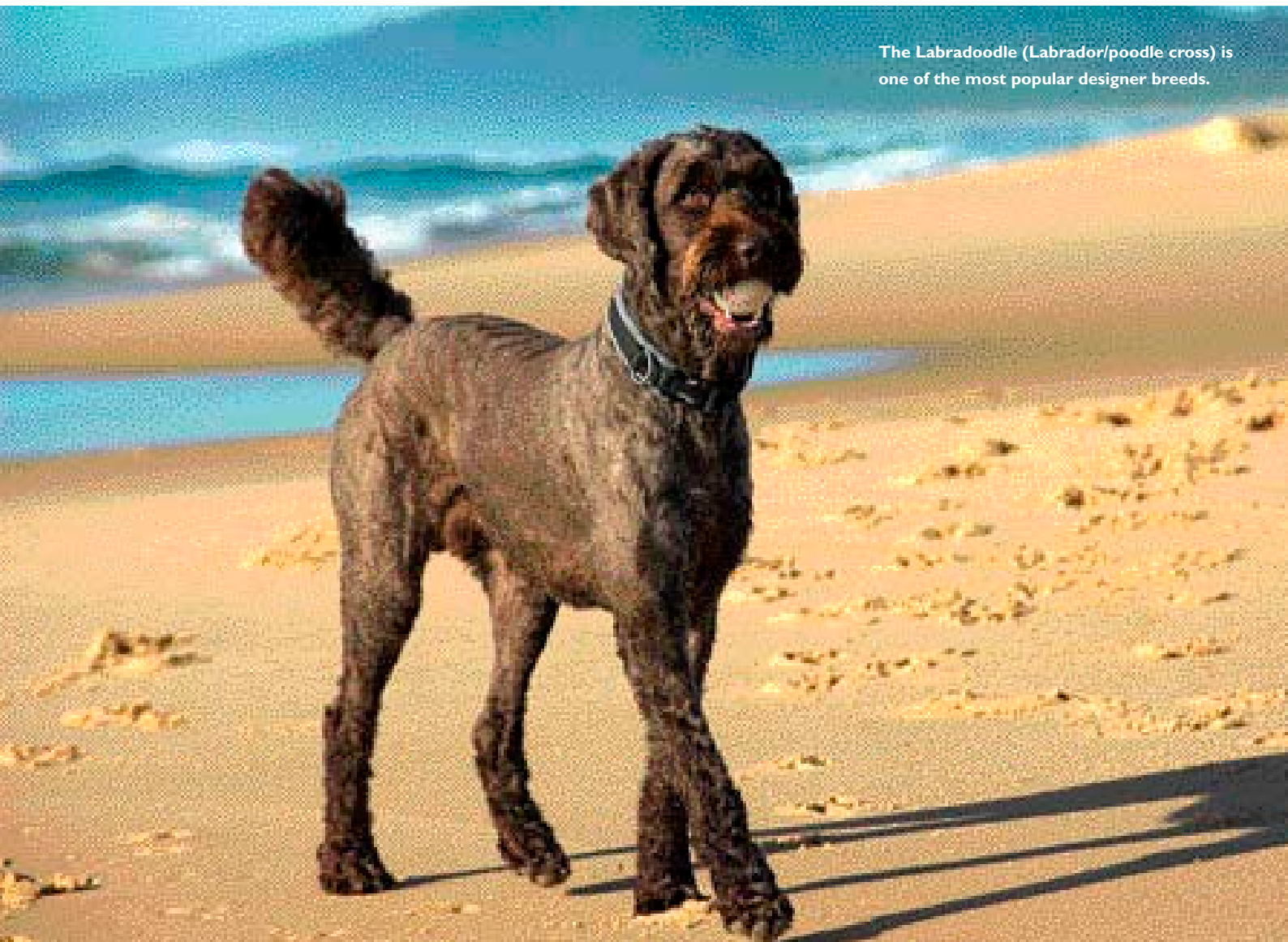
may well have a healthier animal than the pure pedigree version. But you do need to remember that genes are randomly mixed in the breeding process and the results are unpredictable. There is no guarantee that your dog will escape from inherited problems.

Choosing a breed... or not

A standard mongrel crossbred dog may be more likely to be healthy, but there are other potential problems to deal with. It can be difficult to predict the appearance of the adult version when you collect a puppy from an animal rescue centre. Who was the male dog who fathered the pup? How big will the

puppy be when he grows up? Will he be aggressive? If you choose a 'designer dog', it may be easier to predict the final outcome of the adult animal.

So are designer dogs just a fad, or will they become a permanent part of the dog scene in Ireland? A crossbred, pedigree dog can indeed be an excellent idea, but you don't need to pay big money for a trendy made-up breed with a cute-sounding name. Ask around locally, at vets and animal rescue centres. Find out what puppies are available in your area, and if there happens to be a crossbred, pedigree litter of pups, they could be the ones for you.



The Labradoodle (Labrador/poodle cross) is one of the most popular designer breeds.