A long-standing follower of mine on Twitter sent me a direct message a few days after Crufts. A friend of his had announced that having watched the show, she had decided to get either a miniature Dachshund or a Shih-Tzu puppy. Obviously, his heart had sunk almost as much as mine at this news. Sadly, all this did was confirm my long-held beliefs that Crufts has a massive negative effect on dog welfare and fuels the drive for people to own quirky or fashionable breeds.

After I went to Crufts about 12 years ago, I vowed to never go back – a vow that I broke in 2017 when I went with Cavaliers are Special. This group of tireless campaigners is trying to get the Kennel Club to introduce a mandatory heart testing scheme for Cavaliers. Denmark had recently demonstrated a drop in mitral valve disease in this breed of around 73 percent following a mandatory heart scheme. Common sense suggests such a scheme is a good idea in a breed with a 100 percent incidence of MVD.

Several times over the last 20 years I have asked the Kennel Club why they insist on leaving health testing to the breeders’ discretion. They have consistently said that it’s best this way. They say that they don’t want to drive people away or underground. When we handed the petition over to Bill Lambert, the Kennel Club representative, he said to me that they have little power to change things because they only register a very small percentage of dogs in the UK. I think this is absolutely not the case. The Kennel Club wields huge power. They say that they are the bastions of dog welfare. If this were true they would want only the best breeders. Why not have robust health requirements for every single breeder wanting to register animals? The cynic in me says it’s because they would lose a LOT of cash.

As vets we try to encourage owners to habituate their dogs to being examined and handled all over. This helps reduce stress for all concerned when veterinary visits are necessary. I can’t help thinking that the life of a show dog is a step too far though. Personally, I wouldn’t put my pet through hours of travel and grooming, washing, shampooing, restricted play, crating and unnatural on-lead interactions to culminate in yet another stranger groping its balls and mauling it to see if it’s deformed enough to win a prize. A prize that means absolutely nothing to the animal.

Millions of people tune in to Crufts every year. The BBC dropping coverage was something they should be proud of, but, sadly, money talks and it was soon scooped up again. No matter what the Kennel Club says about their impact on registered animals, there is no doubt that Crufts influences millions of viewers – potentially millions of prospective dog owners, whether they buy from a puppy farm or a registered breeder. Dog shows have zero benefits for the animals. They are all about human gratification. If you like hairdressing, get a Barbie, if you like making stuff clean and shiny and showing it off, show antiques or cars. There is no place in our society for this archaic, moronic abuse of sentient animals to satisfy the eternal human hunt for entertainment, glory and rosettes.