

# Buying a Puppy? Did You Know...

By Sally J. Terroux (reprinted with permission)

Over 50% of the puppies raised in the U.S. are raised by people who never have another litter. Relatively few of these people are well informed, prepared for the experience, and do a good job. They don't usually stand behind their puppies. Very few are equipped to take adequate care of all puppies until they can be placed in good homes, regardless of how long that takes. Another large percentage of puppies are raised by "puppy farms" that sell numerous litters of many breeds, or sell to retailers for resale.

That leaves a relatively small percentage of puppies being raised by experienced people who are dedicated to one or two breeds and raising puppies for reasons other than maximum profit. Not all of these breeders are knowledgeable and conscientious.

## How Do You Identify an Experienced, Conscientious Breeder?

1. When you inquire about a puppy, the breeder will interview you. You know they will not sell you a puppy simply because you want one and have the money to pay for one. They want to know that you can house and raise their puppy appropriately and that their puppy will have one permanent home for his entire lifetime.

2. You will talk to and buy the puppy from the breeder who raised the litter and owns or co-owns the mother (or the dam). Conscientious breeders don't trust other people to screen puppy buyers for them and would never offer a puppy as a prize or for an auction. Their puppies don't cost any more because there is no "middle-man." All puppies will have had at least one DHLPP and Parvo vaccination and a worm test or a worming.

3. The breeder will know the ancestry of the puppies. Not just parents, but grandparents and beyond. Not just titles and colors, but strong points and weak points of personality and structure.

4. The breeder will tell you what genetic screening (such as OFA X-rays) is necessary for that breed, will be willing to discuss problems and show proof of genetic screening. Even mixed breed dogs can have hip dysplasia.

5. You won't see multiple litters of multiple breeds. One to three breeds is typical and one to three litters a year total is typical (more in toy breeds with smaller litters). You will see evidence (photos, books, possibly awards) of long-term interest and activity in the breed. The puppies' environment will be clean with ample room for exercise. Puppies confined to a small area can't grow normally and are difficult to housetrain.

6. The puppies will not have been separated from their mother and littermates at less than 6 weeks of age. Many breeders consider 7-8 weeks ideal, some later. But if you look at puppies over 12 weeks of age, be certain they have had enough individual attention and separation from one another, that they are more bonded to people than to other dogs.

7. All things discussed and implied will be written down in a contract. The breeder will be there to help and advise you throughout the life of the puppy. Even to the extent of replacing a puppy in



the case of an inherited defect. Many breeders will ask you to bring the puppy (or dog) back to them at any age if for any reason you can't keep him.

8. Unless you are very serious about becoming a student of your breed and a conscientious breeder, you will be encouraged to take a puppy with a spay/neuter agreement or an AKC non-breeding registration. The breeding of dogs is a responsibility that shouldn't be entered into lightly. The prevention of overpopulation and haphazard breeding is the responsibility of the person selling the puppy.

9. The breeder will insist that you prepare an appropriate place at home for your puppy before you take your puppy home. They will give you thorough personal instructions on puppy feeding and care and a record of vaccinations and worming.

10. If AKC registration application is not yet available, the breeder will furnish you with the registered names and numbers of sire and dam, birth date of litter and name, address and phone number of breeder as the AKC requires.