

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A REPUTABLE DOG BREEDER

by Linda Hazen Lewin

So, you've decided the pet for you is a purebred dog...good for you! Maybe. The question is, how do you find a reputable breeder? There are so many ads in the newspaper and so much conflicting information, and most of the books you read only mention the positive characteristics of the various breeds. (Common sense tells you every breed can't be as perfect as it is described!) How do you find someone who will be honest with you about their breed so you can make a truly informed choice?

The following are some of the typical characteristics of a reputable breeder:

1. Reputable breeders only produce a litter with the goal of improving their breed and with the full intent of keeping a puppy from the litter with which to continue their efforts. They do not breed to make money, to supply the pet market during a wave of breed popularity, to give the kids a sex education, or simply because they happen to have two dogs of the same breed on the premises. These last are all spurious reasons to add more dogs to the current population. If the breeder has produced a litter for a silly reason, beware!
2. Reputable breeders nearly always belong to a local or national breed club and they actively compete with their dogs. Competitions include licensed dog shows, field trials, obedience trials, herding trials, tracking events, earth dog trials and sled dog racing (among others). Reputable breeders know that AKC registration alone does not confer or imply quality or breeding value, any more than a DMV registration means you have a top quality car. Competition with other well-bred dogs helps to gauge whether a given dog is worthy of being bred; whether it offers its breed virtues that are worth reproducing. If the breeder does not belong to any dog organizations or compete with their dogs, beware!
3. Reputable breeders are willing and eager to spend time with you, explaining, teaching and advising you about their breed. They will make the disadvantages of owning their breed crystal clear, and it may be the first topic of conversation! No breed is perfect for everyone, and the responsible breeder wants to be absolutely sure that you really want, and are prepared to care for, this kind of dog for the life of the dog, not just during the "cute puppy stage". If the breeder does not go into breed peculiarities, beware!
4. Reputable breeders will screen you carefully, to assure your suitability for owning their breed. They will not sell a large, active dog to an apartment dweller or to someone without a fence, for example, nor a tiny toy dog to a home with small children. It is cruel to place a dog in an unsuitable home, and unethical to strap people with an unsuitable dog. A reputable breeder will refuse a sale, regardless of any personal financial strain or the amount of work involved, rather than place any dog in an unworkable situation. If the breeder does not question you closely about your home, your family, and your expectations of the dog, beware!
5. Reputable breeders sell only healthy stock, fully vetted, and guaranteed for some reasonable length of time after the sale. Their dogs are tested for any genetic deficiencies which can be detected by the age at which the dog is sold. Puppies should never be offered for sale any younger than 7 weeks of age, and preferably 8 weeks. If they are, you may be sure they have not had all their shots. Adult dogs offered for sale should be completely up to date on shots, recently wormed and heartworm-tested. Records of all veterinary treatments and testing should be offered to you in writing. If vaccinations are not complete and up to date, breed-appropriate testing for genetic defects hasn't been done (or the breeder says "Oh, that's not a problem in this breed" when you know it is), puppies are offered for sale at an extremely young age, or the breeder's dogs appear unwell, beware!
6. Reputable breeders offer, or even require, that any dog they sell be returned to them if your situation changes so that you cannot keep the dog. This applies whether the dog is 10 weeks old or 10 years old. No responsible breeder wants their dogs to end life in the pound, on the streets, or shuffled from one unsuitable home to another because the dog's family can't keep it any longer. Many breeders are also involved, on some level, in breed "rescue" work. When notified, they spend their own time and money to collect the abandoned dog, have it vetted, trained and socialized if necessary, and find it a loving home. While a breeder might not specifically mention involvement in rescue work, if he or she cranks out multiple litters a year, acts as a broker, or makes no mention of taking a dog back from you if

your situation changes, chances are they are more concerned with taking your money than with taking responsibility for the puppies they have produced...beware!

7. Reputable breeders stay in touch with you on a regular basis to see how you're getting on with your new dog. They do not just sell you the dog and then disappear, leaving you to cope with problems on your own. This is probably the greatest advantage to buying your dog from an experienced breeder. You not only get a healthy, well-adjusted companion, you also get a lifetime of information, advice and assistance from an expert who cares deeply about your success with the animal he has sold to you. If the breeder takes the stance that "all sales are final", beware!

Remember, it is up to you, the purchaser, to make your choice wisely and to do your homework. Talk at length with as many breeders as possible, quiz each one on the above items and about their breed, and look at lots of dogs. A reputable breeder will be impressed and reassured that you are concerned about what you are doing, rather than impulse-buying. Find a breeder with whom you are comfortable, and whose dogs you like, and pick out your dream pet. Result: everybody wins!