

YOUR FIRST LITTER FINDING GOOD HOMES AND GETTING YOUR PRICE

by Linda Hazen Lewin

Your puppies are now 8 to 12 weeks old and ready to go to their new homes. How do you find good homes where each puppy will be loved and cared for as well as you have done? How do you screen people over the telephone and evaluate their motives for wanting a Manchester Terrier? The following are some tips for pain-free sales.

Marketing Your Litter

Many years ago, the most popular and successful way to let the public know you had puppies for sale was the classified ads in the newspaper. Unfortunately, this is no longer the best way to reach your best market. The classifieds are now full of litters produced by the less thoughtful breeders, often selling puppies of dubious quality very cheaply. Not only do you not want to be found in this company but you are likely to get only callers who question your price and are looking for a bargain. This is not to say you can't or shouldn't advertise in the paper, but you must be prepared for the kinds of callers you are likely to get, most of whom you will have to turn away.

The best way to get the word out these days is simply via word of mouth amongst the other reputable breeders you know, or by notification to the local or national club's Breeder Referral Representative. In this way, many of the callers you get will be pre-screened to some extent by the other breeders in your area. They are not likely to refer someone wholly unsuitable to you. You may also choose to place a Breeder Classified ad with the American Kennel Club which you can do after you have registered your litter. People specifically looking for a purebred dog will be checking there periodically as well. However you decide to publicize your litter, you still need to screen each caller to help you determine whether they should get a puppy from you.

Screening Callers

Most of the callers you get are looking for a companion dog and they usually have questions right away about the breed itself and about your litter regarding what sexes you have available, your price, registration papers, and when the pups will be ready to go. Some may want to come over RIGHT NOW and pick out a puppy (even if the pups are only 4 weeks old!) and some will offer you a deposit to hold one for them. Before that happens, there is some screening you need to do to determine if the caller is a suitable owner.

First, you need to ask them if they have ever had a Manchester Terrier before, or if they have had a dog before. This will cue you as to their level of experience. If they have not had a dog or a Manchester before, ask them why they decided they want a Manchester in particular. In other words, have they researched many breeds of dogs and settled on a Manchester for sensible reasons or are they impulse-buying? Are they aware of how active Manchesters are? Are they aware that they will need to socialize the dog? Do they have resources near them for training help and do they have a vet lined up? Do they know a Manchester cannot be kept as an "outdoor dog"? Do they know how vocal Manchesters can be and will that be a problem for them or their neighbors? It is the responsibility of the breeder to fully inform potential buyers of all the potential "negatives" of the breed. If the caller still wants a Manchester after hearing the drawbacks, you just may have a sale there!

If the caller has had a dog before, ask what breed it was. If it was not a Manchester, review with the caller all of the questions noted in the paragraph above. It is sometimes enlightening to ask why the caller is not intending to get another dog of the same breed as their previous dog (if it was a purebred). Again, ask how they settled on a Manchester Terrier for their next dog. In addition, regardless of what kind of dog it was, ask where that dog is now. If the caller says it died, ask how: old age? hit by a

car? ran away? The answer you get is obviously significant. If the caller sold the dog or gave it away, ask why. You don't want to place one of your puppies with someone who has a 5-minute attention span, gets tired of the dog as time goes by and dumps it. If the dog "ran away" or was hit by a car, that tells you their yard isn't fenced and the dog was not receiving enough attention and supervision.

If the caller has a dog now and wants another one, again, ask what kind of dog they have. Beware of someone calling who says they have, say, a male Manchester and they want to get a female from you. Many of these people are inexperienced with breeding, think they're going to make bags of money breeding and selling dogs, and fully intend to turn your puppy into a puppy factory with their male. I do not sell puppies of either sex to people who already have a Manchester unless they have the current dog spayed or neutered. Further, the puppy they purchase from me goes to them with a spay-neuter contract and on Limited AKC registration. Always ask callers who already have a Manchester if they intend to get a pup from you for breeding purposes. Most people who intend to do this will happily say "yes" (if they don't intend to breed, they readily tell you they intend to spay or neuter, or agree to spay or neuter their current dog), and you can inform them right then about your rules on selling them a puppy. Of course, if the person calling is a reputable breeder, or an up-and-coming exhibitor known to you, you would sell them a show-quality puppy which is suitable for breeding.

There are other things regarding Manchester sales which reputable breeders consider "de rigeur" and should be asked right away. One is the caller's home situation, i.e., what kind of house do they have and what is the family situation. Do they own or rent? If they rent, are pets allowed by the landlord? Do the other family members or roommates also want a Manchester?

In suburban or rural situations, you must demand a fence. The minimum is a 4-foot chain link. I personally do not consider an underground "electric" or radio fence adequate because some Manchesters just take the shock and run through it, and a puppy can't be trained to it until it is at least 6 months old anyway. What are the owners going to do until then? Also, electric fencing doesn't keep other dogs from coming into the yard and starting trouble. In any case, don't be taken in by people saying "Oh, I'll train him to stay in the yard." Manchesters don't stay in unfenced yards! If the caller says they will put up a fence, it is up to you to visit their home and ensure that it is up (or at least well underway) before you let them have their puppy. No fence, no dog. Period.

Another home situation I question is a farm. I have had occasional calls from people on farms and they inevitably intend to let the dog run loose and expect it to just hang around. Again, Manchesters are not homebodies! Further, in every case I know of where a dog has been sold to a farm the dog has, sooner or later, been hit by a car, run over with a tractor, cut with barbed wire, poisoned with rat bait, or kicked or stepped on by livestock. In one case where the buyer claimed to have 150 acres for the dog to run on, he neglected to mention that his farm fronted on an interstate highway. Yes, the dog was killed on the road. I just feel better not selling to farming homes.

Another absolute requirement in selling Manchester Terriers is that pet-quality puppies be spayed or neutered. Your sales contract should require this and you can also indicate on the registration papers that the puppy will be on a limited registration with AKC (the UKC doesn't have this option). Limited registration allows the dog to compete in any AKC event except conformation showing, yet protects you as the breeder of the dog because if the dog is bred, its puppies cannot be registered. Of course, none of these tactics will keep an unscrupulous person from breeding the dog and selling puppies without papers, but there is a way around that, too. You can sell the dog with the stipulation that upon written proof from their vet that the dog has been spayed or neutered, you will refund the buyer \$100 (or some other amount). This usually gets results because most people want that money!

Finally, be sure you personally meet the person or people who are going to live with, train and care for the new puppy. Be extremely circumspect about people buying a puppy as a gift for someone else. Many people think it's "cute" or "romantic" to buy a puppy for someone, having made no inquiries as

to whether the receiver even wants a dog or has the facilities, time and interest to care for one. Be especially wary of people who are buying a puppy "for the kids", with the children expected to take care of it. Young children do not have the experience, attention span or common sense to properly raise a puppy, and teenagers are generally too involved in their own social life to spend much time with one. It is cruel to the puppy for it to be subjected to the missed meals, inconsistent training or inadvertent mistreatment which are inevitable as the children learn. A parent should always be supervising child/puppy interactions. Just as children are not mature enough to raise a puppy, a puppy should not be expected to raise the children!

Ninety percent of screening can be done over the telephone. If a caller is categorically unsuitable, excuse yourself politely and hang up. If the caller sounds good on the phone, you can make an appointment for them to come and see the litter when the pups are old enough. Get the person's name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address, and keep a record of what they want (male or female, family pet or show dog, etc.). Keep the list in the order in which people called, so when you get your next call for a male you can tell the caller they are second in line, fifth in line, whatever. If you or a co-breeder have first rights to the litter, tell your callers that they will "have first choice after you and the co-breeder decide what you are keeping", for example. Always take more reservations than you have puppies because someone almost always drops out. You also want to have the option to refuse a sale if you feel the buyer is unsuitable after meeting them. Never promise anyone a puppy or take any kind of deposit until they have come to your house and you have met them in person.

What if you don't have exactly what the buyer wants? I don't push the issue if they have their heart set on specifics, but I do encourage them, in the name of education, to come and see the litter anyway. I assure them there will be no pressure to buy but tell them that the more puppies they see, the better they will understand the breed and be able to make an intelligent decision when the time comes to buy. They may indeed change their minds when they talk to you and see the puppies, and decide to buy one from you. If they don't, at least you've done your part to educate them and show them some more dogs before they buy.

What about those who argue with you about price? You can probably write off any caller who asks about price first. These are the bargain-hunters and it is doubtful that they are looking for a quality dog. When they do get a dog, they will probably also bargain shop for a vet (if they spend money on a vet at all) and bargain shop for the dog's food, all to the dog's detriment. Some people get positively belligerent about it and demand to know why you're charging more money than the "breeders" in the paper. Others try to whittle you down as if they're bartering for carpets in a Baghdad suq. Depending on how tolerant you're feeling at the time of the call, you can either offer the short answer (say brightly, "I agree. Why don't you get one out of the newspaper?") or you can explain that you are a reputable breeder of quality, registered Manchester Terriers. Your puppies have been fully immunized, wormed, vWD Clear, and socialized. Their health is guaranteed for however many weeks after the sale and the buyer has the advantage of the assistance and advice of a reputable breeder for the life of the dog. In short, one doesn't get a Neiman Marcus dog for a K-Mart price. If they continue to argue, just excuse yourself and hang up.

On the other hand, you just may get a call from a caring, sincere person who wants a nice dog and can offer it a fabulous home environment, but who simply cannot afford your price. In these cases you can offer special arrangements for paying for the puppy, such as one-half when they get the puppy and the other half within three months (in the meantime, you hold the registration papers until you're paid in full). Of course, it is also your option to drop the price if you choose, but this shouldn't be suggested over the phone. Set up an appointment for them to see the litter so you can evaluate them further in person. Then make whatever financial arrangements you agree to.

Meeting Your Callers in Person

Set up your appointments so they don't overlap. In this way, you can give each buyer your undivided attention and you can evaluate them more closely than you can with three different buyers or families in your house at one time. If you have several buyers coming on one day, set your appointments about two hours apart so you have time to look at the puppies with them, fill out the paper work, and answer all their questions.

When your buyers arrive, have them sit down for a chat before going to look at the litter. Have your adult dogs out when they arrive so they can meet them and see what an adult looks like. Watch to see how your buyers react to the dogs. Do they greet them enthusiastically and reach right out to them, or do they sit primly on the edge of your sofa, acting as if they don't want to be touched? Everything they say and do is a hint to you as to their suitability for a Manchester puppy. I take it especially seriously if the mother of the family looks unhappy in any way. It is inevitably Mom who ends up with the majority of the burden for the dog, and as they say, "If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy."

If a family is buying the puppy, encourage them all to come look at the puppies and talk to you. In this way, you can see how the parents interact with their children and the children with their potential new puppy. You can get an idea of everyone's level of enthusiasm by watching how they handle the puppies and pet your adult dogs. Observe the parent-child interactions. If the parents make no effort to supervise how the kids play with the puppies, you can bet they won't supervise them at home either. If the kids don't take correction, or the parents offer no guidance, you can bet the dog will be reared that way too. A Manchester is too active and smart a dog to be left to its own devices. It is up to you to read the situation and make the decision to sell or not to sell, based on what is best for the puppy.

Remember, as a concerned, reputable breeder, the buyer should prove him or herself to you and it is always your option to refuse a sale. These are your puppies which you brought into the world and they are your responsibility. It is unethical to strap a person with an unsuitable dog and it is cruel to place a dog with unsuitable people. With diligent telephone screening, you shouldn't end up with any real losers at your house but you must always be prepared to end the interview with the firm suggestion that your puppies aren't right for this particular buyer or family, and an invitation to try elsewhere.

Part of my guarantee to new buyers is the proviso that they can always return a dog to me, at any age, for any reason. This does not translate into a refund of their purchase price, however. What it does mean is that I regain custody of the dog, relieve the owners of the burden, and a dog of my breeding doesn't end up in the pound, on the street, or dumped on someone who doesn't really want him. I do provide for a two-week trial period during which, if the placement doesn't work out, I will return the purchase price in full. After that time, I will take the dog back but I will not refund money. It is enough that I am, without notice, alleviating the owners of a perceived problem and having to fit what is now a strange dog back into my household. Oddly enough, in 30 years in dogs I have only had one puppy returned and that was due to a misdiagnosis on the part of the owners' vet. The puppy was replaced within a week, with new owners. An "unconditional return" policy seems to give people a psychological "out", and they work harder at solving their problems.

Make sure your paper work is in order when the buyers pick out their puppy. You will need to provide them with all applicable registration papers (fill them out and sign them; mark AKC registrations for either full or limited registration; let the new owners name their dog themselves except for maybe filling in your kennel name), two copies of your sales contract (one for them and one for you), a 5-generation pedigree, a copy of the pup's shots and worming record, a copy of the pup's vWD test or the parents' or grandparents' VetGen test ID numbers, and your guarantee if you provide one. Some breeders also give the new owners the puppy's first collar and lead, a 5-pound bag of puppy food, a crate, an article on raising their new puppy, or other items. These last are optional on

your part, but if not provided by you, their necessity should be explained thoroughly to the new owners.

A Few More Tips

When people come to look at your puppies, make sure the pups and the litter box are clean. People are understandably loathe to cuddle a puppy which has just finished jumping around in the nearest pile!

If there is a puppy or puppies which you are planning to keep or which have already been spoken for, put them in another room where the visitors will not see them. This also applies to the removal of show puppies when people come to look for a pet. Do not even show them to your visitors because it's for sure that the puppies you have set aside are the ones they will want. People always want what they can't have! So avoid conflict and just put the puppies you don't want to sell out of view.

It is advisable to keep visitors from stepping into the litter box or pen where the puppies are. You should reach in for a puppy and hand it to them yourself. Even though the puppies have been immunized, you never know what outsiders may be carrying on their shoes when they walk in your door. It is better to be over-cautious than to take chances.

Also, it is wise to instruct children to sit on the floor to hold a puppy. Puppies tend to squirm and claw when they are held, and young children tend to drop them. If the child is already sitting on the floor, the puppy won't have far to fall.

Finally, assure your buyers that you are available to them to answer questions they may have after they have taken their puppy home. If they call with a general question about training or feeding, you should be ready to help them out, especially if your puppy is their very first dog. If they have a medical question, it is best to advise them to talk to their vet. After all, vets don't make diagnoses over the phone, so you shouldn't either! Make a follow-up call to all your buyers two or three weeks after the date of sale to make sure all is going fine, and then make another follow-up call after about six months. Do not be intrusive, but make sure they know you are available and interested. Encourage pictures and cards from the buyers so you can be kept up to date on what's happening with the pups.

Soon, the last pup will head off to its new life with its new owners and your house will seem incredibly quiet and serene. Remember to do your follow-up calling in two or three weeks and see how everyone is faring. And give your bitch a big hug -- you both did a great job!