

CHOOSING A REPUTABLE BREEDER

Not all purebred puppies are equal. The mere presence of a pedigree certificate gives no indication as to whether a dog is well bred - it is simply a family tree. For more information please read on....

REPUTABLE BREEDER

A reputable breeder is fully dedicated to their chosen breed. They strive to continually improve health, temperament, conformation and, where relevant, working ability. This is done by: -

- Thoroughly researching the breed in question including lines and genetics.
- Carrying out appropriate health tests for that breed.
- Only using the most suitable dogs in the breeding programme.

They take great pleasure in producing happy, healthy, well socialised puppies for suitable new owners to enjoy.

They do not breed for profit. There are many costs involved, which may include: -

- Spending thousands of pounds investing in top quality breeding 'stock'. This could involve importing from abroad. Travelling expenses to view suitable dogs must also be taken into account.
- Kennels – purchase, maintenance, heating and cleaning costs.
- Health testing.
- Stud fees including travelling costs.
- Veterinary fees.
- Vaccinations, worming and de-fleaing - for dogs and puppies.
- Micro-chipping all puppies.
- Providing a quality, well-balanced diet for their dogs and puppies. Possibly including supplements.
- Study costs involved in learning as much as possible about both the breed and breeding in general.
- Taking time off work to look after the puppies when they are born.
- Attending shows and events.
- Registration costs.
- Breed Club or Society membership fees.
- Website costs.
- Stationery, stamps and telephone bills.

Litters are carefully planned and welfare is of paramount importance.

A reputable breeder is normally a member of a Breed Club or Society and will adhere to their Code of Ethics. They rarely advertise in local newspapers or free-ads, selling their puppies via word of mouth or through their relevant Breed Club. A waiting list may well be in operation.

Reputable breeders will, of course, vary in standard - from satisfactory through to first class.

BACKYARD BREEDER

The term 'backyard breeder' is commonly used to describe someone whose intention is not to better the breed. Their reason for breeding could be:-

- For financial gain.
- They would like to have a litter of puppies for fun.

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- They want to let their children experience the 'joy' of birth.
- They think their bitch would enjoy having puppies or believe the old wives' tale that 'all dogs should have at least one litter'.

The backyard breeder ranges from caring but uninformed owners taking a litter from their pet dog to ruthless individuals out to make money with a complete disregard of the consequences. Either way they: -

- Have little or no real knowledge of dogs or breeding.
- Are unaware or uninterested in the breed standard, the need to select sire and dam carefully and how to avoid genetic health problems.
- Are likely to carry out a particular mating simply because they own or have easy access to the stud dog rather than because he complements the female.
- Are not in a position to support owners or assist with re-homing due to lack of knowledge, experience or interest.
- Do not abide by any Code of Ethics.

It is also worth mentioning that less scrupulous backyard breeders are known to provide fake pedigrees.

The end result is over-breeding, sale of substandard puppies with potential health and temperament problems (which may not become apparent until later in life) and a complete lack of breeder support.

Buying a puppy from a backyard breeder is likely to be cheaper initially but may well end up costing a whole lot more in the long run due to health or behavioural issues. Not to mention the emotional cost involved.

Sadly, indiscriminate breeding and lack of proper socialisation are two of the main reasons the UK rescue system is in a state of near collapse.

PUPPY FARMER

A puppy farmer is basically a backyard breeder on a larger scale. Their sole purpose is to 'farm' as many puppies as possible on a commercial basis with a complete disregard for health and welfare.

HOW TO SPOT A BACKYARD BREEDER

Research as much as you can. If you have a thorough knowledge of your chosen breed it will be easier for you to distinguish between a reputable breeder and a backyard breeder or puppy farmer.

Speak to plenty breeders and ask lots of questions. Reputable breeders will not mind your interrogation; in fact, they will commend the fact you have done your homework. Prepare to be asked about your own experience, lifestyle etc, as reputable breeders vet potential owners very carefully.

Here are some examples of the type of questions you should ask: -

- How long have you been breeding / involved in the breed? How much knowledge do you have of the breed?
- What are your aims and objectives (e.g. what are you doing to better the breed, what standard are you breeding to, what do you know about the puppy's pedigree and ancestors)?

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- If new to breeding do you have an experienced mentor supporting you?
- How many litters per year do you breed or intend to breed?
- Why did you choose this breeding combination?
- Do you intend to keep a puppy out of the litter?
- What age is the dam? How many litters has she had? How often is she bred?
- What health tests have the parents had? (For example, hip scoring under the BVA scheme). Do you have evidence of this (e.g. green BVA form, certificates etc)?
- Are the puppy's grandparents etc still alive? If not, at what age did they pass away? What was the cause of death?
- What price are the puppies? (Check that they are comparable to other breeders - beware of bargains!).
- At what age will the puppies be ready to leave home?
- Will the puppy be registered and with what organisation? Who are the adult dogs registered with?
- Will the puppy be health checked? Vaccinated? Wormed? Insured?
- Do you supply a "puppy pack" (e.g. basic diet sheet, tips on socialisation, tips on basic training, vaccination card, worming record and Registration Certificate)?
- How are the puppies being socialised?
- What after-sales support do you offer? Do you expect to stay in touch?
- Will the pup be sold under a written contract (generally to look out for the dog's best interests)?
- How do you go about matching prospective owners with a suitable puppy?
- Are you actively involved in breed rescue? Do you take in or help to re-home rescue dogs?

Check if they are members of any Breed Clubs or Societies and, if so, do they adhere to a Code of Ethics.

Visit the breeder and see for yourself the condition of the premises, dogs and puppies. Things to look out for are: -

- The puppies should appear alert and healthy (remember pups may be drowsy if just wakened). Look out for signs of ill-health such as runny eyes, sniffles, a dull coat, diarrhoea, lumps, pain or evidence of parasites (such as fleas or ear mites).
- They should be friendly, confident and playful not overly timid, shy, fearful or aggressive.
- The puppies should be kept in a clean, well maintained room with space for them to play.
- Make sure you see the dam! Ensure she looks clean, happy and healthy. What is her temperament like? (Bear in mind she may have lost some condition due to rearing the pups and could be a little protective).
- Are the puppies accustomed to household noises? Have they been well socialized with adults, children and other pets?
- Ensure any other dogs in the household look fit, well cared for and show obvious signs of being happy.
- If you cannot see the sire, at least ask to see photographs.