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## HOW TO FIND A QUALITY PUPPY AND REPUTABLE BREEDER

by Jill Swedlow

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Once you've decided what breed of dog you want, you're next faced with locating a puppy. Most people will naturally turn to a pet store or the want ads in the local newspaper. This is definitely NOT the first place you should look! Buying from a reputable breeder is the best way to obtain a puppy. (Rescue organizations, which are often run and sponsored by breed clubs are another option.) The reasons for this are many.

First of all, most pet stores that deal in large numbers of different breeds are obtaining their puppies from the infamous "Puppy Millers". Puppy mills have only one purpose; to turn a profit. They breed for quantity, not quality, and never health check their animals. Puppies from these places are probably not properly socialized, vaccinated or wormed. There is no consideration given to true breed type or correct temperament. The parents of such puppies are often kept in filthy unsanitary conditions and may live out their entire lives in cages, often without proper shelter. You have as great a chance of being able to predict the eventual looks and temperament of a puppy mill bred pure bred as you do of a mutt from the pound.

The same is pretty much true of the 'backyard breeder', who's ad you'll find in the local paper. Most of these people are not out to make a profit, just careless or misguided. They want their bitch to have a litter to teach the children about the 'joys of birth'. Or they want another 'just like mom'. Or they forgot to get the bitch spayed in time and now they have this 'surprise' litter who all need homes. And, of course, there's always the profit motive. These people have no idea what goes into producing a fine, healthy, sound temperamental specimen typical of the breed. They have no more intention of standing behind this puppy than does the pet store beyond the usual 48 hour health guarantee. Neither the pet store nor the backyard breeder is capable or willing to be there at 2 am when you're concerned that perhaps there's something wrong with the puppy. Although you might pay less for the breed of your choice from a pet store or backyard breeder, it's almost a given that in the long run, you'll pay a good deal more in vet bills and perhaps emotional bills (if the dog has to be euthanized due to a health or temperament problem), than you would from a reputable breeder.

Most breeders of purebred dogs breed dogs for one reason; they are head over heels in love with their breed. Their goals are constant improvement of the breed from litter to litter. When you purchase from a concerned breeder, you can be sure that everything that can be done to insure correct and typical temperament, good health and conformation has been done. Breeders who care about the breed and their puppies don't lose interest in you and the pup once the check has been cashed. They are always there to help and guide. They want to know when there is trouble and will do all they can to assist you. When you buy from a good breeder, you can almost always plan on adding a new friend to your life in addition to the puppy you've purchased

### FINDING A BREEDER

"But I don't know how to locate a breeder", you say? Of course you don't. Most people are faced with the same problem. So where do you start?

1). Pick up an issue of Dog World Magazine or Dogs USA Magazine. You can usually find these in pet stores. Within the magazine there is usually a list of up coming dog shows for all areas of the United States. You will often also see many advertisements for puppies of various breeds too. (In other countries there is likely an equivalent magazine). Usually the Superintendent of the shows is listed along with a phone number. You can call the Superintendent to find out the location of the show and the time the breed that interests you will be judged. Then attend the show and purchase a catalog. The catalogs list the dog by arm band number and also list the breeder and owner of the dog. Likely,

you can ask someone ringside to point out the owners or breeders (regular exhibitors know everyone else), and you can then ask about their dogs. Remember to first find out if they're about to go into a class or not. Exhibitors get intense and nervous prior to their class and this is never a good time to talk. Ask about talking after the show and you'll already have made a friend!

2). The AKC Gazette Magazine is also a useful tool to locate breeders and shows. I've never seen it for sale publicly but you can subscribe to it for \$28.00 for 12 issues a year including a companion publication which lists the upcoming shows complete with the judges and Superintendents names and addresses. Make the check payable to the AKC Gazette and mail to 51 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10010. Besides the show listings, you will also find listings of the various breed clubs across the country. By writing to them you can also locate breeders of your breed of interest. Most "Parent" clubs also publish some type of literature about their breed which is usually sent free upon request.

3). If you're reading this on the Internet, you have the ability to access dog people all over the world! There are many areas of information on pets on line. Search for your breed and chances are you'll come across a Mail List you can join made up of breed enthusiasts of that breed. There's almost certain to be a few fanciers who show and breed who can help you find a reputable breeder.

4). If you have access to the Internet and have a Web Browser, then you should know that you can also locate breeders through CYBER-PET! Cyber-Pet has a wealth of information for pet fanciers. You can find breeders of many different breeds and view photos of the breed you are interested in. Cyper-Pet's URL or Address is: "<http://www.cyberpet.com>".

5). And, of course we can't forget the Bulletin Boards under the Pet/Dog headings on the various online services such as Prodigy, Compuserve, America On Line, and others. These BB's are a wealth of information. There is almost always at least one reputable breeder who monitors them and from these people you will get a lot of good advise as to where to find a puppy/breeder whom you can trust. It's also a great way to find out about the traits of the breed(s) you're considering.

### **ELIMINATING GOOD FROM BAD**

So now you've got a list of various breeders to interview. How do you eliminate the good from the bad? Just because someone shows their dogs, has immaculate kennel facilities and belongs to all the right breed/all breed clubs, does not ensure that they're going to deal fairly with you or that they raise good dogs. Even a pedigree filled with champion ancestors will not ensure that you're getting a good puppy. You need to know what to ask and what to watch for. When you first arrive at the breeders home, notice the condition of the facilities used for the litter. Is it clean, light and airy? Where is it located? If the whelping or puppy area is located away from the main living quarters, ask if the puppies are ever allowed in the house and what has been done to socialize them. Puppies raised in isolation or who rarely see a human other than their breeder, will not adjust well to the hustle and bustle of every day home life. Puppies should be handled consistently and gently from birth. They need to be exposed to different sights and sounds almost from birth. They need to see all different kinds of people, from adults to children to men. If the facilities are dirty and the pups all cower in a corner or do not respond to you, look elsewhere. If the breeder says that they are never in the house and little has been done to socialize, leave without a puppy.

Ask to see the parents. It isn't uncommon for the sire to live elsewhere. Most breeders, especially of larger breeds, do not keep a male, but will take their bitches to the male that is most correct for that individual bitch. It will be more common in smaller breeds to find both parents at the facility. The bitch should be clean, outgoing and friendly. If she slinks around growling, aggressively attacks or tries to hide from you, forget this litter. The same goes for the sire should you be able to see him.

If the litter is very young, and mom is with them, it is natural for her to display some protectiveness via growling or barking. This is certainly acceptable behavior and should not be condemned.

### **THE INTERVIEW**

Expect the breeder to interview you mercilessly! A concerned breeder wants to make sure that her puppy is going to a home where it will live a long and happy life. Breeders want to know that you are willing and capable of taking care of all health needs of this puppy. To this end you may even be asked how much money you make and what you do for a living. In my breed, Great Danes, bloat and torsion are a common disease and the surgery to correct this can run up to \$2000.00. I want to be sure that whoever gets my puppies is willing and able to provide this care.

Common questions asked by reputable breeders are:

- 1). Are you aware of the problems (be they health, temperament, conformation or whatever) in this breed? If you answer in the negative, expect to be educated at great length if this is an applicable subject.
- 2). Do you have a fenced yard with adequate shelter facilities?
- 3). Will your dog be a house dog? (Many breeders will not sell to anyone who does not want the dog in the house)
- 4). Do you have children? (When I am considering a sale to a family with children, I want the children to come over so I can meet them too. I do this to observe how well mannered the children are. If they're obnoxious brats who never listen to their parents, I won't sell this family a puppy. If they can't discipline their children, they certainly can't discipline a great dane!)
- 5). Are you aware of the size, coat etc., of the adult dog? (I always find it amazing when someone wants to get rid of their young adult dane because it 'got too big'!!!! I mean, come on, it's a giant breed folks, what did you expect?) Some people don't properly research a breed before they make a decision to buy and the adult size or coat may be more than they want to cope with.
- 6). Are you aware of the temperament traits of this breed?
- 7). Do you both/all want this dog? (A home where the wife loves dogs and the husband or kids think they're good for nothing, will not be a permanent home for the puppy. Or if it is permanent, probably not a happy one for the dog).

### **CONTRACTS**

A contract is only as good as the people who sign it. I, as do most reputable breeders, employ a contract as a means of setting down the agreement and guarantees of sale. This is a protection for both the breeder and the buyer. All contracts differ, but basically they usually cover

health and temperament guarantees (if any), responsibilities of the breeder and buyer and most will state that they will take the dog back if it isn't satisfactory for whatever reason. Many breeders have a spay or neuter clause in their contract for pets. Don't be alarmed, it does not mean there is anything wrong with the health or temperament of the dog. The dog being sold as a pet may just have a conformation fault such as the bite may be off a bit. Requiring the dog to be spayed or neutered is just a way of controlling the many accidental or misguided breedings and helps with the over population of unwanted dogs. After several months have passed, no one is going to be able to remember every little detail that has been discussed and agreed to and a contract is the best way of keeping the record. Please don't be put off when a breeder tenders a contract. It's for your protection too.

If you've been unable to locate a breeder within your area with whom you feel comfortable, you should consider a long distance purchase. Most breed clubs can help you locate breeders around the country. Many of us now have the use of video to help potential buyers decide on a puppy. When I ship a puppy I always tell the buyer that if for any reason this puppy isn't what they hoped, to rest him a few days and send him back. If you're dealing with a reputable person, there's really little risk in buying a puppy in this manner. You might even do better than trying to find something a bit more convenient. The only extra expense is the shipping and that varies greatly depending on size and weight of the puppy.

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK BREEDERS**

OK, so now you pretty much know what to expect if the breeder is concerned about where her puppies go. Now it's your turn. There are many questions you should ask the breeder.

- 1). What are the indigenous health problems in this breed? (This is something you should learn before you meet the breeder or decide on a breed, but if you know what they are, you'll have an idea if the breeder is being straight with you. When new people come to visit and learn about my Danes, one of the first things I do is tell them all the negatives involved with the breed. If they're still interested after this, then we get down to the nitty gritty).
- 2). Are both parents of the litter health checked for these problems? Will the breeder give you copies of these certificates or reports?
- 3). What, if any, guarantees are offered and under what circumstances?
- 4). What traits does the breeder consider most important when planning a litter? (In other words, Temperament? Health? Conformation? Trainability? Etc.)
- 5). Which health problems has this breeder encountered the most over the years? (If they've bred several litters and they claim they've never had any problems, beware!)
- 6). Is the breeder willing to give references?

### **PICKING OUT THE PUPPY**

It's not uncommon for breeders who really know their breed and their line to not allow the customer to pick his own puppy. For instance, a family with small children will not be happy with the most aggressive puppy in the litter. This is the pup who will constantly be using his teeth and testing his limits. The sharp baby teeth of a pup can do damage to a young child even though they're being used in play. This is a puppy who will need to have firm discipline in order to fit happily into his niche in the family. A better suited puppy for a family with young children will be the one who approaches happily, perhaps licks your hands and wants to cuddle or play gently without constantly using its teeth.

Breeders who are aware of these things know that they're only courting trouble to allow an unsuitable puppy to go to the wrong home. Chances are high that that pup will be returned, or worse, taken to the pound or resold or placed in another home. Permanent, happy homes for both puppy and buyer alike are the goals of all good breeders.

However, if you are allowed to choose from a litter, avoid any puppy who seems ill. Actually if only one puppy seems ill, I'd advise avoiding any pup from such a litter. So you want the pups to be healthy with no evidence of discharge from eyes, nostrils or ears. They should be active, happy and outgoing. There should be no sign of fear. It's OK if initially they approach you with caution as long as they then relax and play. Pups that cringe in the corner with fear are either going to develop into fear biters or are going to need a very special home who can deal with their fearful temperament. On the other hand, the pup that rushes happily up to you, shoving his littermates aside in his eagerness to be the first one to greet you, who bites at your hands and jumps at your chin, occasionally giving you a few little nips, is going to be a true handful, needing strong discipline. Puppies with this type of temperament can become child biters as they seem to view a child who is smaller than adults as a 'littermate' rather than a person to be obeyed.

If you've been lucky enough to find a breeder you trust and purchase your puppy from them, you can look forward to many happy years with the new member of your family.

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