

## PICKING THE RIGHT PUPPY BUYER

All year long I've heard breeders complain about the situations they've gotten into selling their puppies. Pups have been lost, returned, or harmed, thanks to less than keen judgment and a desire to quickly sell to the first comer. Breeders step on each other's toes because of too little communication and too much competition. It's time to seriously ask yourself why you breed dogs and what you must know about prospective owners.

There are plenty of "nevers" in selling puppies: never sell to a family expecting twins in three months; never sell to a family with children under 4 or 5 (even if they're wonderful kids!); never sell to an elderly couple especially if they get indignant [when] you ask them who will take the puppy if something happens to them.

There are even more "beware's": Beware of all forms of psychobabble; beware of people who want a dog [at the last minute] on a special day such as Christmas eve or their birthday, etc.; beware of the buyer who wants two puppies from the same litter, especially a boy and a girl; [I would say beware of the buyer who wants two pets, a boy and a girl--unrelated.A.M.] beware of couples where each one works 12 hours a day, six days a week and they are self home on the seventh; beware of anybody who's not willing to listen or wait. [I would add: beware of the caller who says they want a Dash-hound, or who is interested primarily in price. A.M.]

Then there are buyers who want to choose from the whole litter, including your pick puppy; who insist on everything--when to see the puppies, when to pick one out and when to pick it up--on their terms, not yours; or who ask another breeder to grade your litter.

The last problem happens especially to new and inexperienced breeders who are not too confident; Grading your own litter is part of the learning process of becoming a good breeder.

The most difficult part of selling puppies is that time between the sixth and eighth weeks when you're trying to juggle opinions and deposits, and everyone wants a pet; no one wants a show puppy except as a pet.

The solution is to learn to grade selectively and to stick to your guns. Select a puppy (two at most) you think is promising and be prepared to hang on for at least six months. Sell the others as pets with limited registrations or firm spay/neuter contracts. If you later learn you made a mistake in grading the litter, so be it. That's how you learn.

Keep track of the puppies you sell, not just for your breeding program, but to determine which people make good ....owners.

Good owners come in all sorts of packages. Don't be put off by someone who's a little different. They sometimes make the most creative and sympathetic owners for a breed that flourishes under such qualities.

Don't forget that new owners must be open to new information. You don't need a self-appointed know-it-all who's apt to return a puppy if it's not housebroken by 14 weeks or, worse still, will dump it at the pound, where little credit is given to the breeder who may want the unfortunately placed youngster back. It's this casual, egocentric, demanding and often ignorant attitude that puts the puppy in jeopardy; not the work of concerned breeders who want the best for the puppies they love.

How can you separate the wheat from the chaff among prospective buyers? If you live near them, check out their home. If not, have a friend who lives nearby drop in. Is the yard fenced in? Ask for references--and check them. [Ask if they have had a dog before and what happened to it? At what age did it die and why? A.M.]

It would be great if breeders shared information about prospective buyers. Have they

## PICKING THE RIGHT PUPPY (continued).....

anyone? Everyone? What were the breeders impressions? This can be touchy if there are a number of puppies available in an area, but it's worth the chance and can build good relationships among breeders.

Don't take too seriously what prospective buyers claim other breeders said. They may have misunderstood a casual remark. They may try to impress you by running someone else down. Never discuss another breeder's work or personality on the telephone, especially to a stranger.

Above all, be brave and tough in choosing new owners for your puppies. (They) deserve the best.

[written by Jane Reif for the Tibetan Terrier column in the AKC Gazette, November 1995 issue]

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