

Why Buy Your Next Puppy From A Show Breeder

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"Why Buy Your Next Puppy From A Show Breeder?"

I hear this more often than I'd like to admit: "I just want a pet, not a show dog." And it breaks my heart because it's just so wrong.

I've been around long enough to see families lose their cherished pet to age, illness, or accident. It also means I have been here long enough to see them seek their next new furry friend, too. They will often ask me if I know of any puppies for sale, or breeders I could connect them to, for their next beloved dog. But when I suggest they consider show breeders, they usually shut me down right away. "No, I just want a pet," they'll say.

I cringe when I hear that phrase, because it demonstrates how little most people know about show breeders.

The truth is that every show breeder has produced wonderful pets as well as show prospects! There is so much that goes into what makes a show prospect, and the difference between a show quality puppy and a pet puppy in the same litter can be a minuscule cosmetic difference that doesn't affect the health of either pup. For example, in my breed, the ears should not be set too high on the head. A puppy with ears just a tiny bit too tall is destined to be a pet, not a show dog, even if their parents are both show champions. And

usually there is only one puppy, maybe two, in each litter who will ever grace the show ring. All of their other siblings? Are destined to be pets.

So why pay for a purebred pet from a show breeder? Because puppies that fall short of being show dogs are still more likely to be healthy, and more likely to have a sound, breed-appropriate temperament. This is because ethical preservation breeders utilize extensive health testing before ever breeding a dog. Just being a successful show dog isn't enough for most show breeders, the dog also has to prove they are free of heritable defects.

I will never forget the day we took our elderly German Shorthair to the vet for what turned out to be a benign cyst on his face. He was fifteen at the time but because he was exceptionally well bred and well built, you'd never have guessed his age.

He hadn't been walked that day due to the extremely early morning vet appointment, so he was practically vibrating with pent-up energy. He was also super excited to see Other Dogs, and so he was literally prancing and dancing in place, panting enthusiastically, and occasionally doing a cute spin-in-place.

In walks a couple with another German Shorthair, but she was stiff, slow-moving, clearly riddled with arthritis. She was limping so slowly, it was so painful to watch. I could tell she was very poorly bred...don't get me wrong, she had a sweet, kind face and beautiful soulful eyes, but those eyes were cloudy and her sweet face was taunt with pain. Her haphazardly bred body was shaped in a way that caused her to struggle in her old age just to get around.

The couple who owned her watched our German Shorthair prancing and dancing, spinning in place, and they chuckled. The gentleman eventually made a comment along the lines of "He's still a young puppy, not like our old girl!"

I laughed and replied "Nah, he's actually fifteen years old."

The couple gawked at our dog and the gentleman exclaimed, "Really? Our dog is ten."

Oh, my heart. That poor dog.

Ten years old and riddled with arthritis from her badly angled, unsound legs. Ten years old and eyes clouding over, soon to be blind, because none of her ancestors were screened for vision defects. Ten years old, and OLD. Our fifteen year old Shorthair was still pain-free, able to hunt and run and play all day. His good conformation meant he was limber and sound. His remaining eye (he lost vision in one eye from a porcupine accident) was clear and bright. Their indiscriminately bred dog was older at ten than our well bred dog was at fifteen.

I'm sure when they got that sweet old girl as a puppy, she was as cute and loving and delightful as our German Shorthair was as a puppy. The truth is that all puppies are cute, no matter where they came from. It's the many years later in life that the vibrant health of a well bred dog truly shines through. It's the pleasure of watching a dog age gracefully and beautifully, with as much dignity as possible.

Quality breeding isn't a be-all, end-all, absolute guarantee because not all defects are genetic. And not all genetic defects have a simple pass-or-fail test. However, puppies from health-tested parents have the deck stacked in their favor. Show breeders aim for soundness, which means a body that moves freely as well as legs that have good angles to them so the dog can move appropriately for their breed. If you are going to share your life with a pet, don't you want them to have the best possible chance to be healthy and sound?

I know firsthand how heartbreaking it is to watch a dog endure a life with health problems. While most of my dogs have been well bred dogs from ethical breeders, I did have one little train wreck of a rescue dog. I'd been grooming rescue dogs for free for a local rescue group, and I was looking to add a new pet to my family. I chose a little mostly-Chihuahua, part Dachshund mix...she was half a pound when I brought her home. This cute, rambunctious puppy was so loving and sweet. I named her Cricket.

She had deformed front legs...bilateral luxating patellas...and hip dysplasia. She had difficulty getting around her whole life, and while her forelegs made her limp, it was her bad knees and hips that caused her the most pain. She also had blood sugar problems, began losing her sight pretty early in life, had dental issues due to a misaligned jaw, bone density problems, and as it turned out, poorly developed organs. She died of heart and liver failure just before she turned nine years old.

I loved that dog so much. Losing her has been unbelievably hard.

There are people in this world who enjoy taking on dogs with major issues, but I am not one of them. If a dog I own develops an issue, I will live with it and deal with it, because to me a dog is a lifelong commitment, but I will never knowingly take on another rescue dog with major health issues. The organization I got my sickly little dog from was up-front that she had some issues, but they had no idea how many or how severe they were.

The difference between my tiny dog, bred irresponsibly and unethically and then dumped in a rescue the day after she was born, and our German Shorthair, bred by an ethical breeder from champion bloodlines, is night and day. With his good breeding, he lived until near the end of his sixteenth birthday, and he was sound and pain free until the last two weeks of his life. With her very poor breeding, my little mutt was struggling from birth, until her death. She lived less of a life than I hoped, and it still troubles me how hard she struggled to just get by.

There is absolutely no shame in wanting your dog to be the healthiest, happiest, most vibrant they can possibly be. The best way to get a dog with amazing good health is to buy pets bred by show breeders.

Good physical health isn't the only benefit to buying from show breeders, though!

Something I don't see enough discussion about is temperament. Contrary to popular belief, it is NOT all about "how you raise them." Temperament is a very heritable, genetic trait! Breeders who breed ethically strive for the best, most stable breed-appropriate temperament

possible. Far too many unethical breeders don't even take temperament into account when breeding, and this leads to some very unstable, sometimes dangerous dogs. I will never forget the woman who came into the salon I used to work at with a massive, obnoxious Labrador. He was constantly yanking her around, jumping up on people and trying to get at other dogs. The woman asked if we had any tips for dealing with his increasingly aggressive biting issues. He'd started by being nippy, then progressed as a yearling to full-on biting people for no reason.

When a co-worker recommended (in addition to training classes) they neuter him, the woman said "Oh, we don't want to do that, we plan to breed him."

"And how many people has he seriously bitten already?" was my reply. It hadn't even occurred to this woman that her increasingly vicious Labrador might pass on his terrible, aggressive temperament to his offspring! And that isn't uncommon in my experience; pet people who breed their pets rarely even realize the flaws in their own dogs. It makes those haphazard, unethically bred puppies very unpredictable; you could get a stable, loving temperament, or you could end up with a neurotic, vicious disaster.

Show dogs have to have a stable enough temperament to deal with extensive grooming, handling and examination by strangers, and coping with many people and dogs they don't know. Plus since ethical show breeders are breeding to the written breed standard, they are also breeding for proper temperament, which is a part of the standard.

Like I said, buying from an ethical show breeder isn't a complete guarantee, but it's a much safer route than buying from unethical breeders!

I'd also like to take a moment to mention that show dogs are pets, too. I don't know any show dogs who aren't also beloved pets! My next dog will be a show dog...and my pet. He will enjoy the same comforts and delights as all of my pets have! He will frolic at the dog beach and hike with me in the beautiful national parks I live near. He will wander with me through dog-friendly shops at the pier nearby, and snuggle with me on a picnic blanket for the musical fountain. There'll always be a spot on my lap or beside me on the sofa for binge-watching the newest Netflix original. All of this, in addition to strutting his stuff in the

show ring on weekends.

If anything, a show dog's life is even more enriched than the average pet dog, because attending dog shows is something people do WITH their show dogs! Every show dog I've ever met (and I've met many) absolutely love it. They love traveling with their people, showing off, and of course all the pampering and grooming before the show, too. A show dog is a pet with extras!

I've also got a secret for you: some show quality dogs are sold as pets. I've known several breeders who had show-quality puppies who were just the perfect fit for a pet home, so they sold the puppy to be exclusively a pet.

So when I suggest a show breeder, and hear people say "I don't want a show dog, I just want a pet," I flinch on so many levels. **Show breeders DO produce pets. Show dogs ARE pets. And ethical show breeders who health test their dogs before breeding produce the best possible pet dogs."**

Courtesy of Kyle. L. Lawrence