

How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?
Buying a Dog from a Pet Store ©
Provided by the CSPCA, Inc. Public Education Committee

We have all passed a pet store and have seen the puppy in the window, "...the one with the waggley tail!" Pet stores usually rely on impulse buying for their puppy sales. It is important to become an informed buyer before you consider purchasing any puppy from a pet store, even though their puppies are cute. The price one eventually pays, because of veterinarian expenses and other health problems, may be far more than that listed on one's sales receipt.

Many puppies in the pet store have been bred and raised by large corporations. Other puppies are raised as livestock and are sold to animal brokers who, in turn, acting as middlemen, may sell entire litters to pet store chains. In either situation, the goal is to make money by producing the largest number of puppies for the least amount of money. These organizations may have no knowledge of the health issues in the pedigrees of the dogs that they are breeding or brokering. A person who purchases a puppy in a pet shop may not learn if health screenings were performed on either the puppy or its parents. These examinations are important issues when one is seeking to buy a quality pet. Reputable breeders spend years researching and learning about pedigrees to determine what factors contribute to producing the healthiest and best dog possible. Good breeders specialize in their chosen breed, usually no more than just one or two, and rarely try to breed many different breeds. They know the breed standard, temperament and characteristics of their selected breed(s). They strive to breed animals that reflect only these acceptable qualities, thus benefiting the buyer by allowing a type of "quality control."

The best breeders always take time to properly socialize their puppies. They give the special handling and attention needed during the early critical developmental stages in the puppy's life. This socialization helps its adaptation and adjustment to life with its owner as well as with other dogs, by providing a foundation for future learning experiences. A carefully bred, well socialized puppy makes a happy and "eager to please" animal that is a pleasure to have in one's home. Brokers and corporations have no such plan in place. It costs huge investments in money, time and energy to properly socialize puppies, none of which the large corporations are willing to spend.

Because the breeder has been laying the foundation for learning through socialization, and because your puppy has not been kept in a small cage for prolonged periods of time, buying your pet from a breeder may make "housebreaking" easier. Constant and prolonged confinement in a cage, such as in a pet store or commercial breeding facility, leads to a loss of the puppy's innate clean nature. This enforced confinement complicates housebreaking because the puppies become used to living with their own waste. By living in the climate of a home situation with the breeder, this never happens. Most Shar-Pei puppies are already house broken when purchased from a breeder.

The majority of breeders have years of experience with their breed and willingly share this knowledge and information with their puppy buyers. Additionally they can provide references from their veterinarian as well as from their satisfied puppy buyers. This combination (breeder, veterinarian and satisfied buyers) provides the buyer with a valuable source of information should any problems arise after his pet is home. They can give advice on nearly all aspects relative to the caring for and the training of one's dogs. Most breeders provide written instructions on how and what they feed, as well as how to care for and to train one's pet. The buyer also has the comfort of knowing he has a concerned individual who is but a phone call away.

In the event that one finds it impossible to keep one's pet, the responsible breeder will help in the relocation of the pet. In most instances they also have a comment in their sales contract stating that they have the first option to regain the puppy should the owner find he is no longer able to keep the dog. The reasoning behind this policy is to insure the safety and comfort of the dog and to facilitate its relocation into a suitable environment.

A puppy buyer will not find this kind of information, knowledge or help when dialing the phone number of the large breeding corporation or his local pet shop.

It is in the best interest of any breed to obtain specific health screening tests on one's breeding stock. Certain tests are performed to guarantee that their animals are not passing on undesirable traits. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) provides a registry for health clearances on all breeds of dogs. There are other health clearance registries as well, but the OFA is the primary one. The most common clearances one seeks are for hips, elbows, patellae, and eyes (CERF – Canine Eye Registration Foundation). The buyer can request such information from his breeder who should be able to provide a copy of those records. Good breeders check one, if not all of these facets before they will breed a dog. They make it a point to be aware of all known inheritable defects affecting their breed. If appropriate tests are available, concerned breeders screen their breeding animals to be sure they are free of any such defects. Such precautions may not totally eliminate a genetic defect from appearing, but it will certainly decrease their chances from occurring. These breeders understand the importance of weeding out animals which do not meet an acceptable standard in order to guarantee they are never used in their breeding programs. Such scrutiny may not be used with the breeding stock at large commercial breeding corporations, puppy mills and animal brokerage firms. When these screening tests are not done, one runs the risk of spending hundreds to perhaps even thousands of dollars to correct potential defects and illnesses should they appear.

Although it costs money to obtain health clearances and certain certifications prior to breeding animals, it is an expense which most breeders feel is well worth the money. A breeder can quickly spend anywhere from \$150 and perhaps as much as \$500 on the health testing of each dog they breed. However, when one's bottom line is a profit and loss statement, such expenses become unjustifiable. Too often one finds that the large commercial operations spend much less on their breeding programs, and charge far more for their puppies than that done by the independent breeder. Pet stores frequently charge significantly more for an allegedly purebred Shar-Pei than that charged by a good breeder - and the buyer receives much less for his money.

Individual breeders contribute substantial amounts of money yearly to research projects investigating genetic defects for their breed. This is done individually and voluntarily through their national breed clubs. They do so willingly with the hope of discovering the source of and possible solutions to specific problems within their breed. Commercial breeding facilities or puppy brokers do not contribute money to such research for any of the breeds of dogs that they handle, breed or broker; nor do they provide any form of assistance to the buyer after the sale has been consummated. If nothing else should raise the flag of alarm, these two facts alone, no interest in research and no help after the sale, should warn the buyer about their dedication to and their concern for the dogs that they either breed or broker.

A reputable breeder wants to better his beloved breed by striving to constantly produce animals of high quality. This concern, the sole reasoning behind a quality breeding program, is the endeavor to improve the breed – the attempt to produce the “perfect” dog – the one that meets or exceeds each and every standard – the one that not only wins at competitive events but most importantly proves its ability to repeatedly and predictably reproduce itself! This effort carries a high price, not only in time and money, but more significantly in the love and devotion poured into the development of one's breeding program. Good breeders consider themselves lucky just to break even on their litters.

If you earnestly desire to have the best chance of acquiring a healthy, vibrant and well adjusted puppy, one bred with a great deal of thought given to pedigrees, health issues, and socialization; then we suggest you smile but keep on walking when you see that “doggie in the window!”

(For more information on what qualities comprise “a reputable breeder”, please read our article entitled: CSPA Recommended Breeding Practices. It can be found at:

http://cspca.ambitioushosting.com/breeders/recommended_breeding_practices.asp