

## Chapter 1

# Passing the Responsible Dog Breeder Test

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Why purebred dogs make sense
  - ▶ Who should breed dogs
  - ▶ Why responsible breeding is an issue
  - ▶ Contributions you can make
  - ▶ Working with a mentor
- 

**S**o what's the big deal with breeding dogs? Old Nell did just fine by herself whelping and raising her litter of tail waggers. The pups grew like weeds and once they started eating on their own, off they went to their new homes. That was that!

*That*, however, was then, and this is now. Cities or counties that let you keep any number of horses, cows, and goats place strict limits on the number of canines that you can house on your property.

Attempts are being made everywhere to control the number of dogs that are born. If you think that there's no reason for these controls, all you need do is pay a visit to your local humane society or animal shelter.

We certainly don't need anyone else adding to the country's ever-increasing canine population unless they're breeding a certain kind of dog for specific reasons and under sensible guidelines. The American Humane Society reports that well over 15 million healthy and friendly dogs and cats were euthanized in the year 2000. Most of the dogs were mixed breeds, but many of them were purebreds that were born into caring homes but who fell into the hands of irresponsible disappointed owners.

I say "disappointed" because a good many of the purebred dogs in the shelters are there because they failed to live up to the romantic expectations their owners had. Even a pricey dog won't be Lassie or Rin Tin Tin. Purebreds in shelters are there because they didn't arrive pretrained or pan out quite as heroically as the owners expected.

This chapter is intended to make you think long and hard about taking on all the responsibilities connected with dog breeding. If, after careful consideration, you do decide to breed dogs, this chapter contains valuable tips and advice on who you can contact to help you with your goals.

## *Why Purebreds Make Sense*

All puppies are cute. Just about anything naughty they do is forgivable, because they do it in such an innocent and beguiling way. Who wouldn't melt at the sight of puppy? Unfortunately, all this puppy cuteness lies at the bottom of many problems.

Puppies like the ones shown in Figure 1-1 grow up, and not all of them grow up to be cute or have the temperament that you may want them to have. (Although what's attractive and compatible to one person is not necessarily seen in that light by another.)

**Figure 1-1:**  
These  
Cavalier  
King Charles  
Spaniels  
puppies,  
like most  
purebreds,  
offer a  
strong  
degree of  
predict-  
ability in  
how they'll  
act and look  
as adults.



*Photo courtesy of Jerry Vavra.*



Size and temperament can vary a bit within any of the purebred breeds. However, the results of hundreds of generations of selective breeding pretty well insures the buyer of what the puppy he purchases will look and act like as an adult. Therefore, the surprises and disappointments that you have with the surprise package of a mixed breed just aren't as prevalent.

Just as important as the predictability of size and personality, and even more important to some people, is the fact that you can purchase a purebred dog for a specific purpose and feel reasonably certain that the pup will grow up with the ability to fulfill that role. There are hunting dogs and guard dogs, dogs inclined to bark at most any unusual sound, and dogs that live to do nothing more than bring a ray of sunshine into your life. You can get a better sense of this in Chapter 3.

In fact, many breeds are amazingly specialized. There are field dogs that freeze at the first scent of hidden game and point it out to the hunter. Other breeds will swim through icy water to retrieve winged fowl that the hunter has brought down. Some breeds of dogs protect by attacking on command, while other breeds knock intruders to the ground and stand guard and call for assistance by barking.

There are companion dogs so small and light in weight that even the most elderly person can manage them easily. There are breeds with such an inborn need to please and assist that they are easily trained to become guide dogs for the blind.

No doubt exists in my mind that practically any dog, purebred or not, is capable of becoming a great companion. However, common sense would indicate that if we are going to perpetuate any kind of dog it should be one that has a high potential of finding exactly the right kind of home and owners who will be satisfied that they got what they really wanted

## *Who Should Breed Dogs*

Many people believe that the only real requirement for breeding dogs is just being a dog lover. I wish I could say that's true. Unfortunately, it's not. Granted, being a dog lover is an essential component of a good dog breeder's makeup. Who else would be willing to put up with all the disappointments, setbacks, and sheer drudgery that is often involved?

Much more is involved in becoming an accomplished breeder of dogs than loving them. In fact, a mighty long list of characteristics mirrors the one that I give to people who ask me where they should go to buy a well-bred dog.

If I were forced to select just one word to describe the characteristic that overrides all the other important characteristics of a good dog breeder, that word would have to be *responsibility*. So much that's involved in breeding dogs can be done haphazardly or not at all. Practically no laws or licenses exist that *force* anyone to be a good breeder. Other than those that are self-imposed, there aren't many sanctions for a lack of ethics in dog breeding.

### The Responsible Breeder Checklist

- ✓ The Responsible Breeder is a member of the national breed club and participates in activities that support the breed: Conformation Shows, Obedience Trials, Agility Competitions, Breed-specific events.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder follows all breed-club recommendations for hereditary defect testing of all breeding stock.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder does not release any dog, puppy or adult, to a new home before it is sexually altered, unless the dog is specifically designated as show or breeding stock.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder does not release any dog, puppy or adult, who has not had an identifying microchip implanted.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder takes all necessary steps to insure that each and every dog bred is given all the socialization that's appropriate for the dog's age.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder maintains proper housing for the breed with adequate room for exercise.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder is vigilant in maintaining clean and sanitary conditions at all times.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder is always prepared to make appointments for prospective buyers or those interested in breeding to view the dogs.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder guarantees in writing the health of all stock sold.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder is available for the lifetime of the dog to answer questions related to dogs sold.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder will take back any dog sold if the buyer is unable to keep the dog.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder uses a sales contract in all instances that clearly defines the rights and expectations of both buyer and seller.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder has all registration and veterinary documents relating to the dog available for inspection at the time of the sale.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder does not permit any dog to go to a home or environment that is not entirely suitable for the breed of dog.
- ✓ The Responsible Breeder has completed all inoculations appropriate for the age of the dog being sold.

## *Why Responsible Breeding Is an Issue*

The responsible breeder gives each and every dog bred or owned all the care and attention it needs. That care even precedes the birth of the dog. Many hidden hereditary factors must be considered when mating two animals. I find it hard to believe that an irresponsible person would take all the time and endure the high costs involved in determining if the breeding stock about to be used is clear of some of these debilitating physical problems or temperament flaws.

You must understand that no breed, no dog, no animal (human or otherwise) is entirely free of hereditary defects of some degree or another. Chapter 9 takes a closer look at what can be inherited, both positive and negative.

## *Contributions you can make*

Breeders who consistently produce mentally and physically sound dogs and who adhere to guidelines similar to those listed in the accompanying Responsible Breeders' Checklist can derive great satisfaction from the dogs they breed. Breeding and owning that dog of your dreams is a point of great pride, but the satisfaction can and does extend far beyond those few dogs who you're able to keep.

You can't help but take pride in knowing that you have established a line of dogs that's positively altered the course of the breed. That contribution lives on long after you have bred your last litter — even beyond having said a final goodbye to the last dog of your line.

Everyone who breeds championship-caliber dogs takes pride in the accomplishments of their dogs, but an even greater thrill can be derived from seeing what those outstanding dogs are capable of doing for the breed.

## *Stories of encouragement*

Some years back I was invited to judge in Sydney, Australia. My first breed of the day was Bichon Frises, a breed that I had some measure of success with back at home in the United States. Among the entries was a dog of such outstanding quality that he stood heads above anything else that was competing.

I placed the dog Best of Breed and at the conclusion of the judging told the exhibitor that she should be extremely proud of having bred the dog. In my opinion, I told her, the dog was undoubtedly the best specimen of the breed I had ever seen.

She thanked me profusely and told me the dog had done a great deal of winning in Australia. She then said, "You have reason to be proud as well. Everything in this dog's pedigree goes back to your stock!"

I learned that dogs I had exported to England had produced well for their new owners there, and they had exported offspring to Australia who produced the dog that I had just awarded a top prize to.

Or consider the letter a friend of mine who raises Pugs received from the mother of a young man who was a paraplegic. The young man's injuries were the result of an automobile accident he was in while still a teenager.

The mother wrote, "Pugsley (the name of the dog) is absolutely devoted to my son and never leaves his side. When my son is due back from school, Pugsley sits at the window watching and waiting until he sees the van drive up. I think the greeting between the two is a high point in both their days. I can't thank you enough for sending this wonderful, wonderful dog into our lives. He has been a godsend!"

Other friends and breeders have told me wonderful stories about how their dogs have protected children or sounded the alarm when fire threatened. Bee Godsol, a dear friend of mine and a famous breeder, had her life spared because of the devotion and intelligence of two Newfoundlands who she had raised since the day they were born.

If you're not familiar with the breed, a Newfoundland is a very large (120 to 150 pounds), heavy-coated dog with a very calm and gentle nature. You'd never think it to look at the big old fellow but, when the need arises, the "Newfie" is a devoted and protective companion to those whom the dog loves and a heroic rescue dog for even an absolute stranger in need.

Bee was driving home from a friend's with just the two dogs in her car. It was late at night and snowing heavily. Her car hit a patch of ice and skidded off the road and down a steep embankment. Part of the way down, the car hit a tree and the impact threw Bee out of the car. Bee couldn't move her arms or legs. She was paralyzed and helpless in the blinding storm.

Between long periods of unconsciousness, she realized that her two Newfoundlands were lying close on each side of her. Occasionally, they would go off and she would hear barking in the distance.

When she woke up in the hospital, she was told that someone driving along the lonely stretch of road had stopped to investigate why a huge black dog was alone and frantically barking at the side of the road — obviously in a frenzy about something. The passerby soon realized that something was amiss at the bottom of the ravine and called for help.

When Bee awoke in the hospital, the ambulance driver told her that if it hadn't been for the dogs, she couldn't possibly have survived. The only problem he encountered, the driver said, "Was those two black beauties who couldn't decide whether we were there to help you or do you harm. It took a whole lot of coaxing and petting to get them to let us put you on the stretcher!"

To be responsible for bringing dogs into existence who have as great beauty, persistent devotion, and intelligent bravery as the dogs in these stories is something that most breeders aspire to. Naturally, every dog who you breed isn't going to be responsible for stories like these. Having that type of impact really isn't the point of breeding dogs. But the stories do illustrate that remaining loyal to what the creators of our breeds intended the breeds to be and do is a sign of great respect and, in a way, preserving the breed shows a love of mankind as well.

## *Working with a Mentor*

Breeding dogs with the beauty, the brains, or the abilities that the breed is intended to have isn't something that you can do easily. In fact, just breeding one dog that combines *most* of what the breed standard requires is a genuine accomplishment. It doesn't just happen by accident.



### **A eulogy for a dog**

Lord Byron, the famed eighteenth-century poet, eulogized his own Newfoundland, Boatswain, on an epitaph that appears on a monument at his estate at Newstead Abbey in England:

Near this spot  
are deposited the Remains of one  
who possessed Beauty without Vanity  
Strength without Insolence, Courage without Ferocity,  
and all the Virtues of Man without his Vices.

This Praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery  
if inscribed over human Ashes,  
is but a just tribute to the Memory of  
BOATSWAIN, a DOG,  
who was born in Newfoundland May 1803  
and died at Newstead Nov. 18th, 1808

In a perfect world, the beginning dog breeder would spend at least a few years reading, studying, and observing the rights and wrongs of a breed. A newcomer would fully acquire the knowledge that old-timers in that breed have to pass along. The study time would also help the beginner learn some of the lingo that goes along with all the different breeds. **Note:** If I start to use some of that lingo, there's a glossary in the back of the book.

## Where to start

Most of us have not yet achieved nirvana, entered paradise, or otherwise become perfect. We're inclined to get started where most dog fanciers get underway — somewhere near the middle.



Most of the people I know who are now established breeders have told me that they were well under way and already owned a number of dogs before they came to the realization, “Uh oh, what I *should have done* was. . . .” Fortunately, all of us learn (or should learn!) from our mistakes. The time and courage it takes to retrace your steps and go back to where you may have veered off course can put you on the short route to success.



Once you've decided on the breed that you want to raise, get your hands on everything that you possibly can that has been written on the breed. But here's a strong word of caution: DO NOT BUY, and I repeat, **DO NOT BUY, ANY DOGS!** Don't even take any freebies!

You don't even know enough at this point to know whether you're buying that pig in a poke you always hear about. In fact, at this early stage of the game, you may be better off if you do wind up with a pig, because the animal that could be foisted off on you may not even meet the standards of our porcine friends.

## Where to go

After the dog bug starts nipping away at you, you'll undoubtedly want to start seeing some dogs. The most logical place to go always seems to be a dog show. Do go, but leave your wallet at home!

Why do I say that? Invariably, the first person a novice gets hooked up with at a dog show is exactly the last person they should get hooked up with. Accomplished breeders and exhibitors are successful because they've kept their noses to the grindstone and worked hard at what they do. If they take time off from their busy schedule at home or at the kennel to go to a dog



show, it's because they have something important to do at the show — like show a dog, judge, or watch someone they admire judge.

The best breeders don't have time to lurk around corners and pounce on unsuspecting beginners to try and sell them a dog. There's a reason these people don't have anything better to do at shows and I don't think it would take a whole lot of explaining to have you figure out what that reason is. You wouldn't think of handing over your hard-earned cash to that guy who approaches you on a street corner and says, "Wanna buy a watch? Solid gold and cheap!" would you? Probably not. You won't find any solid gold dogs waiting for you *anywhere*, and even if there were some out there for sale, you can take my word that they're never available at bargain prices.

## *Who to meet*

Respectable and successful breeders always have time for novices, but invariably they arrange that time by appointment. They have you come to their home or kennel to view their dogs and discuss the breed.

This arrangement gives them an opportunity to size you up and determine just how serious you are about becoming involved in their breed. Most major breeders are delighted to find someone genuinely interested in joining their ranks, someone who will breed conscientiously and well. They want to see their good dogs go to such a person. You can rest assured that they're not going to take a chance on placing a dog or puppy of the quality that's taken them half a lifetime to breed with someone they suspect jumps into every new hare-brained notion.

A successful breeder who determines that you're sincere about becoming involved in their breed — in possibly becoming a breeder or an exhibitor — will bend over backwards to help you. If you can locate someone like this to act as your mentor, it's worth every minute of the time you invest in doing so!



You can't imagine how much time and money I've watched people spend on dog after mediocre dog, breeding one unsuccessful litter after the next. They do so because they've had no one to guide them in the right direction or upon whom they could rely for sound advice on how to go about planning a breeding program.

The most successful young breeders I know are those who in their early years of breeding simply followed the directions of their mentors. Only after they learned how it had all been done successfully in the past did they feel equipped to try some well-thought-out experimenting. And they are still willing to have their mentors evaluate their efforts.

## *Solo Flights*

I can only imagine that along about now you're wondering if I'm not making a bigger deal out of all this than I need to. You just want to breed one good litter of puppies to have something to show or to hunt with or to do whatever your breed is supposed to do with.

You're probably also feeling that I've not only sent you back to prep school, but that I want you to remain there under the headmaster's thumb *forever*. Will you never be able to do this on your own?

All this information and the recommendations to seek guidance are here to encourage you to do *whatever* you plan on doing in dogs at your best possible level. This includes those who plan on breeding one litter or many.

So, when I'm talking solo flights, I'm talking to both those who plan to breed just one time and to those who look at all this as something they will be doing for the foreseeable future. I'm sure there are some of you among the latter who hope to eventually succeed to the point where your success warrants you becoming a mentor to someone else.

I feel equally certain that some of you reading this wonder just how important one litter of puppies can actually be. How can one litter of three or four puppies have any impact on the future of dogdom?

Even a single litter from a breeder who didn't have sufficient knowledge of the breed or disregarded hereditary problems can have disastrous effects. Offspring of such a litter — or even of one dog in that litter — can contribute untold problems to a gene pool and cause a great deal of heartbreak and financial burden as well. I'd like to give you an unfortunate example.

A newly married couple I know called me for recommendations on where to buy a Rottweiler puppy. I told them that I would be happy to get them some names of responsible breeders because there are a good many problems in the breed that they should be aware of before buying. I wanted to be sure that they got a dog that was as trainable and intelligent as the best Rotties are.

Before I had had any time to locate someone I felt confident in recommending, the husband called back to let me know that they had found "just what we were looking for!" A friend of a friend had mated their female to someone's male who had advertised the services of a "huge registered male" in the local paper. A litter of ten resulted. (Why are there always more puppies in the litters that shouldn't be than in the litters that should be?) The young couple chose Bruno, who was, according to the husband, "The biggest, bossiest male of the bunch."

Fortunately for the buyers, Bruno didn't grow up to be the biggest, bossiest adult! In Rottweilers, this can prove to be more of a handful than most people are prepared to cope with. Actually, the dog grew up to be very sweet tempered. However, that's the only thing about the dog that one could list on the positive side of the ledger.

By the time I was able to see Bruno, he was two years old and his owners had spent well over \$6,000 on veterinary bills. He proved to be extremely dysplastic (*dysplasia* is a crippling hip disorder) and he needed complicated surgery. (I go into the details about some of these hereditary problems in Chapter 10.)

To complicate matters, Bruno was unable to keep food down after eating. Prolonged and expensive testing by several different veterinarians revealed he had a malfunctioning digestive system that required regular medical supervision and an expensive specially formulated diet. They were given no hope for improvement.

Just before my arrival, their vet had advised the couple that Bruno was now developing severe problems in his stifles (knee joints) and the problem required more surgery. Although I certainly don't claim any medical background, I could easily see from Bruno's very awkward movement that something was radically wrong.

The young couple was devastated. They were just getting established financially and they were expecting their first baby in only a few months. Now they faced the possibility of more huge veterinary expenses.

They were at a loss and asked me what they should do. I knew what the truth of the matter was: that the dog should be put down. I also knew that doing so was absolutely out of the question in their minds. Instead of telling the truth myself, I suggested they see a veterinarian friend of mine, knowing full well what his honest advice would be.

Fortunately, my friends had made no attempt to breed Bruno. However, I don't even want to think about the breeding plans the owners of Bruno's nine brothers and sisters have for their dogs.

Going back to my question of how much difference just a single litter of puppies can have — I'll let you think about the answer.

