

What you should look for in a breeder

I have some pretty definite ideas about what I would look for in a breeder of a dog that I was going to buy. To be honest, the purchase price of a dog, is the least of my worries when I'm going to buy a dog for myself. A dog is not a loaf of bread or a gallon of milk, and there really is something to the saying that you get what you pay for when you buy a dog.

The price of a Brittany puppy can have a huge price difference between breeder a and breeder b. Why is that? Well, the person with the low price Brittany probably doesn't do health testing. They probably also don't show or field trial their dogs. They may not even belong to the American Brittany Club. Does that matter to you? Yep, it sure does.

Brittanys do have some health conditions. Hip dysplasia is one. In those lines of dogs that have consistently been certified against hip dysplasia, the incidence of HD is rare. There are two organizations that reputable people use to evaluate hips. One is the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). OFA rates passing hips as Excellent, Good, or Fair. You should look for MANY generations of consistent OFA certification in a pedigree. You can check online at www.offa.org to see if the dogs in a pedigree have been screened.

Penn Hip is another service. Penn Hip unfortunately does not have an online site for you to check to see if the information on hips provided is accurate. Penn Hip also does not tell a person that a dog has "passed" a screening. They give distraction scores for both hips and advise that scores that are closest to .3 are less likely to have hip dysplasia later in life. Anyone who tells you that a .something hip score from Penn Hip equates to anything at OFA is not being truthful. I do both Penn Hip and OFA on most of my dogs. My dogs that score OFA good or better also Penn Hip .3 or better. (for example... Pave' is OFA good, and has a .32 and .34 distraction index.)

What do I suggest about a breeder that neither OFA or Penn Hips their dogs? I'd suggest that you back out of the driveway, and leave without a puppy.

The American Brittany Club Health Committee suggests that dogs that are used for breeding have even more health screening than just hips. In order to be CHIC certified (Canine Health Information Center) a dog must have been tested for hips, eyes yearly between ages 2-8, and one additional test. Dogs that are CHIC certified are also recorded on the OFA webpage (www.offa.org).

A breeder should be able to talk to you about the other issues in Brittanys, and let you know what they do to avoid those conditions. Epilepsy is a problem, and there are currently no tests that we can do to identify dogs that may be carrying genes for the condition. Epilepsy is in ALL lines of Brittanys. However, it is more prevalent in some lines of Brittanys. A quality breeder knows the bloodlines and issues behind their dogs and know pedigree combinations to avoid to try to minimize any issues.

A good breeder stands with their new puppy owners. Forever. A good breeder will not shy away from talking to you about circumstances that may come up during a dog's lifetime. You should ask. Personally, I will take back ANY puppy or adult dog that I have sold, for the lifetime of that dog. Dogs that I have bred should never end up in an animal shelter. If the person you are thinking about says that they will not take a puppy back, run. If the person will not be available to help you thru issues with a puppy, run. While as a breeder I don't want to hear about people who are already thinking about ditching a puppy before they've gotten their puppy... I do want to have a frank talk about what happens in case you get in a bad situation. I want to talk about it so much that I bring it up.

A good breeder is more than happy to show you their dogs. You should ask to see them. I'm not saying that you should move in, or hog someone's day. Most good breeders are on a schedule, they have stuff to do. It is not unreasonable to see where your puppy was raised. It's not unreasonable to see the breeders other dogs. Are the dogs clean, well fed, happy? Do not buy a dog from someone because you feel sorry for it. Please do not. If you buy a dog from someone who doesn't adequately care for their dogs, you are encouraging them to keep doing more of the same.

When a breeder talks about show or field trial dogs in the pedigree... are they using someone else's glory or their own? Do THEY field trial or show? It makes a difference. While many dogs without a title can be a nice dog, you should look for dogs in a pedigree that have proven that they have the right stuff. Breeding quality dogs takes more than just throwing two dogs together. Even if you are buying a dog to just be a pet, remember, all dogs should be pets first. However, all pets are not necessarily dogs that should be bred. You want your pet to be one that is going to be healthy, happy, trainable and sound for the dog's lifetime. You also want that lifetime to be a long one. When the parents of your puppy have show or field titles it is a good indication that the breeder cares about type, temperament, trainability and all of those other intangibles that go into making your puppy a dog you can live with.

The last thing that I would look for is longevity. Is this person that you are going to buy your new family member from a long time dog person? How long have they been breeding Brittanys. If they haven't been in the breed long, do they have a mentor who is advising them? Will this person guarantee this dog? Will they be there in the future if you have a problem?

The American Brittany Club has a Code of Ethics. The person you buy a dog from should follow it. You can find the Code of Ethics, here:

http://clubs.akc.org/brit/abc_code_of_ethics.htm

Again, buying a puppy is a decision that you and your family should make with eyes wide open. A good breeder produces dogs that are sound of mind and body, with the ability to work in a variety of different venues. A wise consumer does their homework and picks a breeder with care and consideration. Dogs don't live nearly long enough in the best of situations... you want your new dog to be a healthy, happy and productive member of your family for as long as possible.

I feel very strongly that people who purchase dogs from substandard breeders perpetuate substandard breeders. If people stopped buying dogs from people who do not put the time and attention into their breeding practices, those breeders would stop breeding dogs. As a consumer, you determine what dogs get bred. Think about it. When I tell people that they should buy a breeder, I mean it. I also mean it when I think you should plan on having a long term relationship with your breeder... hopefully 15+ years. It is hard to do that from a pet shop or an ad in the paper.

Now that you have a little more education on what you should look for in a breeder, I will tell you what I need from you as a buyer. When you send me an inquiry, please do not email me... "How much do your dogs' cost?" If you do, I most likely will not email you back. Tell me why you want a Brittany. Tell me your dog experience. Tell me what you plan to do with your Brittany, and where it will be housed. I have one or two litters of puppies a year. If you would like to be placed on a list for a puppy, you need to sell yourself to me. I am responsible for the lives of the dogs I produce, and I take that charge seriously. I hope you screen me as judiciously as I will screen you!