

How to Purchase a Quality Puppy

*Quality puppies come from careful dedicated breeders who strive to improve the Chesapeake Bay Retriever
~ To create a better dog ~ Puppy buyers are the recipients of these dedicated breeders' efforts!*

When purchasing a puppy it is wise to educate yourself in the differences each breeder and litter has to offer. This guide is to help you differentiate between a quality breeder of pure bred dogs vs. the Back-yard- breeder (BYB). Sadly most folks go with what ever and who ever is the closest- not checking and comparing- and can run the risk of ending up with a health or temperament time bomb!

Breeders

American Chesapeake Club

Most quality breeders of Chesapeake Bay Retrievers are members of the American Chesapeake Club (ACC). The ACC has a Breeders' Code of Ethics that must be followed to comply with club guidelines. Some of the Club's ethic guidelines include:

- Strive in each breeding to improve the breed according to the ACC Breed Standard.
- Conscientiously plan each breeding based on parents of appropriate temperament, appearance, and other desirable qualities.
- Be aware of genetic defects which can be harmful to the breed.
- When breeding, endeavor to select animals that will reduce the incidence of genetic problems while enhancing the positive attributes and abilities of the breed.

Goals

Quality breeders have planned litters to help them achieve a short or long term goals for their kennel. It is best when comparing litters to understand what the breeders' goals are for the litter- this way you will know if the Litter/Breeding will fit your needs. For example, breeders plan litters to replace breeding stock, or to make a great gun dog or perhaps the next Best In Show super star. Each breeding results can vary in temperament and prey drive so it might not fit to your situation. Back-yard-breeders rarely have short or long term breeding plans. If a breeder can not tell you what their goal is for the litter then they have no business breeding dogs.

Number of yearly litters

Some kennels are larger than others and produce more litters yearly, while other kennels only breed every few years or when they need a replacement dog. Just because a kennel has many dogs it does mean they are producing quality puppies. When comparing breeders you should ask how many litters they have per year. It will help you to understand if your puppy will get the time and attention it needs for the best start in life. The more litters the breeder has at any one time will take away from your puppy's quality socialization and care.

Experience & Credentials

Even among quality American Chesapeake Club breeders there are wide ranges of breeding experience. You want to understand how long the breeder has been actively breeding Chesapeakes. You also want to see that the breeder is active with the ACC and promotes Chesapeakes through local club functions.

References

Most all breeders- even those who would be considered "Back Yard" can produce someone to say they had a good experience buying a puppy from them. But a quality breeder will have many pleased owners- some even in your area of the country- that can help as a resource when looking for a local vet or training center. Top breeders will supply references from other breeders and trainers of Chesapeake Bay Retrievers.

Litters

When comparing litters please be aware that there are several different types of breedings that occur in Chesapeake Bay Retrievers. So you want to be sure you are comparing “apples to apples” and finding the right type of breeding to fit your situation and needs.

Show Dogs

The most common litter is called a "Show to Show" breeding. The normal goal for a “Show to Show” breeding would be to produce that next beautiful dog for the show ring. You can easily recognize these breedings because the parents will have a CH (show champion) title in front of their name and typically no titles at the end, or they might have a competitive obedience title like CD or CDX. These types of breedings normally produces a good quality family companion, are easy keepers and good light hunting dogs too

Gun Dog

A less common breeding is for “Gun Dogs”- these dogs normally have titles at the rear of their names such as JH, SH, MH from the AKC. The United Kennel Club also has a formal Retriever Testing program and awards titles such as HR, HRCH, GHRCH. The other group who tests retriever skills is NAHRA, and their titles are- SR, WR, MHR, GMHR. Dogs that have these titles have proven themselves in structured field environments that simulate hunting scenarios. Gun dog breedings should produce a dog with a high level of trainability that are birdy and have a quality build. They are a pleasure to hunt with and can easily fit into most family situations, but do require a more dedicated owner.

Field Trial Dogs

The least common breedings are for Field Trial dogs- these dogs will have several different types of titles such as *** (asterisk) behind their names or a DUAL, FC or AFC in front. AKC Field Trials are very competitive- the Chesapeake takes on the black Lab- and there is only one "winner"- so for a Chessie to earn a Field Trial title is a big accomplishment! Field Trial breedings produce dogs that have a very high prey drive and are not typically good for hectic family life. These pups will NEED to retrieve or have a "job" and require a more experienced owner.

* Please note- that breeding dogs is always a gamble- so it is possible not all puppies in a litter will fall into these three groups. Some breedings of pure show dogs have produced outstanding field dogs and vice versa. But a knowledgeable breeder will be able to pre-determine the litter’s attributes before the breeding takes place and can grade the puppies at 7 weeks as to their abilities and personalities.

Kennel Visits & Facilities

Quality breeders will welcome visits to their kennels to “show off” their dogs! Most breeders require appointments to insure that the facilities are clean and the dogs are secure. When arriving for a kennel visit please be aware of the “guarding type nature” of Chesapeakes. It is not uncommon to see a big display warning, and then when the breeder is present the dogs should relax and be friendlier.

Observe the dogs with the breeder and your family members- you should find them outgoing and interested. The dogs should appear to be clean, healthy and well cared for. Dogs kept in kennels will sometimes be a little oilier to the touch and have a slight odor.

Ask the breeder to show you where the adult dogs are kept and where the puppies are raised. Some breeders prefer to have the young puppies in our homes rather than out in a building. This allows for more interaction with the pups and for greater socialization.

Health Clearances

When comparing litters please be sure to look for health clearances on the parents, grand parents and great grand parents of the puppies. Chesapeakes, like many other retrievers and large breeds have hip and elbow problems. The Orthopedic Animal Foundation (OFA) can certify both hips and elbows- check out their web site at www.offa.org So you would want to see clearances on at least the litter sire and dam- but even better would be to have certifications for several generations- great grand sire and dam- to be sure that the breeder is providing correct info on the litter you can search the OFA data base at their web site.

Also, Chesapeakes have genetic eye diseases such as cataracts and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) which is adult onset of blindness. These certifications are done by testing- yearly eye exams called CERF and DNA blood test for PRA. At least one of the parents should be PRA-A1 so you can be sure your pup will not go blind from PRA.

Remember, all pure bred dogs have genetic health problems; luckily Chesapeake's are plagued by only a few. Breeders who "claim" that they never have problems are not telling you the truth, or lack breeding experience, or they may not follow up with their buyers to uncover and address problems. A quality breeder will do the best job they can to make good breeding decisions to eliminate genetic health problems and stand behind their puppies.

Puppy Prices

You will find that most American Chesapeake Club Breeders, who have generations of health clearances and titles on their dogs, sell their puppies for more money than the ones you see on many of the commercial puppy sales web sites that attract the Back Yard Breeder.

There is a BIG difference in the quality of puppies and breeders found on commercial puppy sales web sites. Most do not have all the health clearances (OFA/CERF/PRA) on the parents, nor does the "breeder" have any idea about how to breed a quality dog with a good temperament. They either have two dogs- male & female or have a litter for their children- or their female "had an accident". These folks normally are not aware of some of the underlying health issues in their dog's pedigree- such as- entropion, seizures, and thyroid problems.

Quality Chessie pups, from quality breeders run between \$700 to \$1500. Cheap puppies (under \$600) are the first sign that the breeder is NOT producing a quality puppy. Most puppies from quality breeders are sold on advanced reservations and limited AKC non breeding registrations (papers).

Most puppies are priced according to the titles that the parent's have achieved. The more performance titles and/or field titles the higher the stud fee and the higher the price of the puppy. Some people say they just want a pet so what does it matter about the titles. An AKC Championship Title (CH) on the parents prove worthiness for breeding purposes, excellent type and structure. With performance titles (such as CD, JH, SH, MH or ***) this would show how trainable the parents are which should mean a more trainable pup for you.

Puppy Selection

A quality breeder will select the right puppy in the litter to fit your family's situation and needs- after all it's one the most important things you pay for when purchasing from a reputable experienced breeder!

Each puppy develops their temperament and body structure at different rates of growth. Some pups physically mature by 7 weeks, while others need an additional 5-7 days. The same goes for a puppy's temperament. Each puppy responds differently to daily stimulus in their environment based on how they feel mentally and physically on any given day. To fully assess an individual puppy's temperament you would need to monitor its reactions to daily stimulus over a long period of time- subtracting the days when the puppy was not it's self due to stress or illness. Long-term careful observation of each puppies development gives us a full and complete picture of who that puppy is and his potential for the future.

Some breeders do not want to put in the upfront time to evaluate their pup's temperaments nor do skill assessments- so they pass that chore onto the buyer in a term called "pick puppy". This type of breeder will assign you a slot based on the first come basis. For example, if you are the third person to place a deposit on the litter for a female puppy- you will get a slot called- "third pick female".

When you go to pick up your puppy, this type of breeder will simply place all the remaining pups in front of the unsuspecting buyer and tell them to "pick". Most buyers are then faced with an overwhelming decision- which puppy to take home. So they labor about liking this puppy's head or coloring, but never fully understanding the puppy's true nature or personality.

The buyer bases their puppy selection on its "look" or by "last man standing". "Last man standing" is the puppy who is in your lap jumping up and down saying "pick me" pick me" while all of his/her litter mates are sleeping. "Last man standing" is normally the most active puppy in the litter and most likely not the best fit for your situation or needs.

Quality breeders will spend many hours observing the pups and putting them through tons of temperament tests and skills assessments to fully understand each puppy's personality. To make sure their puppies go to the right homes the breeder should base puppy selection on your families' needs.

Timing

In our "instant gratification" society- folks like to call today and buy tomorrow. This just isn't the way to purchase a quality puppy. Quality puppies from quality breeders are in high demand which creates waiting lists. Puppy buyers should try to plan ahead- research breeders- asking them for info about their breeding practices and conduct kennel visits BEFORE placing a deposit on a litter.

In some cases you have just lost your dog and desperately want to fill that empty spot in your home. But hasty decisions and taking the first pup that you can find, can lead to long term heartache. If you just "have to have" a dog right away- it is best to consider adoption from one of our quality rescue organizations. These puppies and dogs have been evaluated and have undergone medical clearances before you bring them home. Most rescue organizations also provide post adoption help when needed. Remember- some of these wonderful Chesapeakes are there through no fault of their own! Please don't hesitate to ask us to help you find a Chessie rescue group in your area.

Contracts & Guarantees

Quality breeders sell their puppies with a written guarantee that you should be provided before you place a deposit on the litter. The guarantee should be in writing and cover most genetic problems such as hips and eye conditions. The length of coverage should be at least 2 years- as this is when the dog will have completed growing and the hips & eyes can be certified (see Health section above).

Some breeders will require that you sign a puppy purchase contract. These contracts are normally put in place to protect the breeder, puppy and buyer. Each state has different requirements for puppy purchases. It is your job to ask the breeder for all guarantees and contracts required/ supplied before you place a deposit for a puppy.

Breeder & Puppy Myths

- "Both parents are on the premises" ~ In most good quality breedings the stud dog does not reside at the breeder's kennel. A dedicated breeder uses the right stud dog for their female regardless of its physical location.
- "All of the puppies are show quality" ~ In each litter there are a hopefully a few outstanding pups that could be considered for showing and breeding homes.
- "All the pups in the litter will make great bird dogs" ~ Even in the most high caliber Field Trial breeding all pups do not have the same desire for their birds.
- "Runts" ~ This term was made obsolete by good nutrition and health care. All puppies in a quality litter should be within several ounces of each other before leaving for their new homes.
- "Dogs with CH (bench show champions) can't hunt" ~ While this statement may have some element of truth in other retriever breeds- the Chesapeake can obtain a DUAL Championship- both Field and Show!
- "Pick Puppy" ~ Each litter should produce pups that can be considered for breeding purposes. Normally the breeder of the litter will select a puppy from the litter that they intend to keep. This is called the "pick puppy". Please keep in mind, that just because the puppy is called the "pick" it does not mean it is the best puppy in the litter. The breeder's "pick" puppy has the qualities that they would like to use in their breeding program for the future, but might not necessarily be the right one for you.

Post Puppy Purchase

While narrowing down your list of breeders, be sure to ask if they will provide health and training help for your new puppy. You want to find a breeder that is approachable, someone who you can trust and feel comfortable with- remember, the breeder you select will be your resource for the future!

Please take your time, find the "right" puppy from the "right" breeder during the timeframe that you would like to add this important family member- after all it will hopefully be a relationship you will have for the next twelve to fourteen years!

Thanks you Laura Herzog for this article