

WHAT IS A BREEDER?

Written by Peggy Adamson in 1969

The breeder is the mainspring of the dog world. Without the breeder, there would be no dogs. Without the dogs, there would be no kennel clubs, no dog shows, no judges, no handlers, no trainers, no dog food companies, no dog publications.

Despite their importance, the breeder represents a very small segment of the dog world, which in turn, creates the dog business. Furthermore, they are the ones who seldom, if ever, make a profit, even in the most popular breeds; and since they cannot take a livelihood from their breeding activities, they must be able to rely on some other source of income.

Why then, do people ever become Breeders??

A breeder has, in his mind, a perfect dog that he someday hopes to create. He presses on to breed his ideal dog, unfettered by desires to be a conformist, or to pander to the buying public. Like the artist or sculptor, he is activated by a creative, inner drive which is totally unaffected by considerations of what will sell or what won't. Unlike the sculptor however, he is working with living flesh and is constantly fighting time. He can never put his work away and come back to it later. The raw material on which he labors is constantly changing - sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse; sometimes as a result of his efforts and sometimes in spite of them. Nature and Time are his greatest adversaries, yet when he least expects it, they may prove to be his greatest allies. The sculptor can use the chisel to chip away at his mistakes, but it may take years for the breeder to see where he has made a mistake - a mistake which in some cases may never be remedied.

True breeders speak the same language, whatever their breed. Without the slightest previous communication, they discover that they think the same way, they have the same ideals and goals and standards of behavior and the same awareness of responsibility. Like the Beautiful People in the social world, they immediately recognize each other - not because they know each other's names or who they are, but because as kindred spirits they realize what they are.

Just WHO and what IS a Breeder?

Technically, anyone who owns or leases a bitch and produces a litter out of her is a breeder of dogs. It is of no matter what considerations were involved in the choice of mate or what the puppies were like, or how they were disposed of - perhaps to the nearest pet shop. This person has bred a litter, the minimum requirement to becoming a Breeder. He is now on the lowest rung of the breeding ladder. How far upward he goes will depend on many factors, some of which are under his control, and some of which are matters of luck. Some people paint all their lives but never become real artists; some people raise hundreds of litters of puppies, but never become true Breeders.

Let us consider how people buy their first pure-bred dog. It usually comes about in one or two ways. In the first case, the person passes a pet shop with a litter of puppies, frolicking in the window, lingers to watch and impulsively decides to buy one of them. Presto! he has now become a dog-owner. In the second case, a person sees a dog in the street, in the movies, or on television, likes its looks and makes up his mind to have one just like it. How does he go about it?

He picks up the newspaper, sees a litter advertised, goes to look at it, and comes home with a puppy. Few people in either group have ever seen a dog magazine or been to a dog show. They want to buy a dog (and I say this in quotes) "with papers" although they have only the foggiest idea what they mean. The dogs that these people buy are like children who grow up with no family.

A much smaller portion of pure-bred dogs are bought as a result of advertising in dog magazines and other trade publications. These are the dogs which form the bulk of our dog shows. For the most part, they are bought from Breeders. They are not usually the result of impulse buying, but of considerable searching, looking and even waiting. Many of these dogs are the second pure-bred dog for the owner, the first having come from one of the two groups first mentioned.

How does a dog-buyer move from the first or second group to the third? Some never do. But if, by sheer luck - and it is often just that - the buyer gets a reasonably good breed specimen, he may become interested in the breed and want to find out more about it. He may attend a dog show, read books and magazines, seek out training classes and dog clubs and by his own efforts become what the cognoscenti regard as a "Dog Person". But he has to do this all on his own.

Had he bought his dog from a real Breeder, everything would have been much easier for him. Just what does he get from the Breeder - or let us say, what can he expect?

Family Pride

First and above all, he gets a pride of ownership, not only in a breed but in a family. The pedigree he gets with his dog will mean something to him - the real Breeder will see to that. It will come alive to him - if not immediately, certainly eventually! There is magic in a name which stands for something, and it will rub off on all that possess it.

We see this in the case of our great families in the social and political world, the Rockefeller's and Roosevelt's, the Astor's and the Kennedys. In the dog world we find it in illustrious kennel names. These names do not become illustrious overnight, nor are they illustrious merely because they are familiar to people through aggressive advertising. A name which is synonymous with quality in the mind of the public is that of a great store, "Tiffany's". How long would it retain its aura if we began to hear television commercials shouting its' prestige, or urging "Rush to Tiffany's this weekend for the greatest sale of the year"? Thus, because a name is known to the public is no assurance that it is a great name. Only years of high standards and good taste will create a name that is an asset to a human being, to a product, or to a dog.

The Influence of the Real Breeder is Far Reaching

He invests the people that buy his dogs with the desire to become breeders themselves and an appreciation of all this entails. From him, they learn a philosophy of showing, a code of ethics in sportsmanship. They learn how to train their dogs, or where they can be trained, how to handle their dogs and where and when or whether to show them. The breeder encourages them to go to training and handling classes, read books and dog magazines, advise them how to breed their bitches, raise their litters, take care of their old dogs. He answers innumerable questions and gives out emergency advice when they can't get a veterinarian. All this, a good Breeder attempts to do. Unfortunately, as the years go on, he realizes he has created a Frankenstein, which grows constantly bigger and threatens to devour him. For this reason, all Breeders eventually reach a point where the more conscientious they are in recognizing the demands on them, the more difficult they find it is to take care of all of them.

The Breeder is Like the Head of the Family

He gives those who buy his dogs a sense of "belonging". This is of the utmost to people with their first or second dogs. They develop an interest in the dog's ancestors, about which the breeder can give them a wealth of information, and in the dog's relatives. Thus is built up a great family pride-- in their own dogs and in all the other dogs that carry the same kennel name. They learn from the breeder more about their breed and what constitutes a good specimen of it than they could ever find out from any book. The breeder, in a good many cases, is also a specialist. This is to say, he is an authority on his own breed and can be expected to know more about it than any judge who is not a specialist. He teaches those to whom he sells his dogs to evaluate their own dogs, many times encouraging and training these people so that some day they may be able to become specialists themselves.

The real breeder disciplines himself not to expect gratitude or appreciation for his services-- which is well, because those who benefit most will rarely give public recognition to the fact. The real breeder does what he does because of what he is. he cannot do otherwise.

Breeders have a great deal to say about their Breed Standard. They give generously of their time to the national Breed organization and it is through a consensus of the breeders that the Standard is arrived at, or changed.

The Breeders are the Aristocracy of the Dog World

If there is a caste system, they are at the very top. Each breeder has a great sense of his own worth. Individually, that is. He is proud to be what he is and what he stands for. However, he rarely thinks of his worth collectively with other breeders. That is because Breeders are independent and individualistic. Therein lies their strength - and also their weakness. It is why their importance as a group is constantly overlooked in the hierarchy of the dog world. There are many more women Breeders than men Breeders, yet the American Kennel Club, which could not exist without breeders, allows no women to be a part of its governing body. (NOTE: Remember, this was written in 1969) Even an all woman club which is a member of the AKC must be represented by a man. Obviously, this discrimination on the basis of sex is a matter which advocates of equal rights for women have not as yet taken notice of!

The great advances made by any breed - and I am not here referring to registration increases - have all been brought about by the Breeders.

In distinguishing between the Breeders in the best sense of the word and those who fall short of it, I shall refer to these people as

The "Breeders" and the "Puppy Raisers"

The primary difference between the Breeder and the puppy-raiser is the awareness of responsibility; responsibility to his breed, to his goals, to the dogs he has bred and to the dogs he hopes to breed. He also has a never-ending responsibility to the people who have bought his dogs, to the people who are about to buy his dogs and to the public image--not only of the dogs he has been producing but of the breed itself.

The Breeders are essentially givers. They give to their chosen breed much more than they will ever receive. Their rewards are intangible rather than financial. Here again is the great difference between the Breeder and the puppy-raiser. The latter produces puppies in order to sell them, getting them off his hands as quickly as possible before their cost has eaten up his hoped-for profit. The breeder, on the other hand, has an entirely different motivation. He breeds a litter only when he can devote the necessary time, money and work to it. He never breeds when he knows he will be up against a deadline; that is to say, a time when he knows all his puppies must be sold.

Never, never does he breed a litter unless he plans to keep something from it, which hopefully will bring him one step closer to producing his ideal dog. If the litter is disappointing, he may sell the whole litter; but the better the breeder, the less often he will find it necessary to do this. The Breeder is constantly selecting and pruning his stock, sometimes because he no longer needs it, and sometimes because he has discovered a reason why he does not want it. The two reasons are very different. In the case of a dog he no longer needs, the reason may be that he has gotten from that dog what he wanted in order to further his breeding plans. In the case of the dog he no longer wants as breeding stock, he may have uncovered a reason why this dog would be detrimental to his breeding program.

The Breeder is Constantly Faced with Difficult Decisions

Actually, the latter are his breeding cast-offs. Yet they may be delightful as individuals. They are not so faulty that they should never be bred, yet they fall far short of the Breeder's standards. They are like the so-called "seconds of sheets and towels by Famous Makers" that stores advertise as "slightly irregular"

The breeder does his best to put these dogs in the homes of people who are not primarily interested in breeding, but all too often they turn up later with litters advertised in newspapers and magazines, trading on his name and reputation to help sell the puppies. Though the dam and/or sire may carry his kennel name, the puppies are not of his breeding, a distinction that the dog buying public seldom realizes. Sometimes this causes the Breeder embarrassment. Much more often, it fills him with annoyance. Many years ago, this situation occurred in one of the dog magazines with a Collie Breeder, who proceeded to feature the following statement in all her advertising: "The purest water is at the well".

The Puppy-Raiser does not Care to Whom he Sells His Dogs

The important objective for him is to get them sold, and as quickly as possible. He is like the gardener who scatters his seed all over the ground with little regard for its subsequent growth and cultivation.

The breeder, on the other hand, has deep concern for the ultimate destination of what he has produced. To him, a dog is not an over-the-counter commodity to be sold to anyone who wants it and has the money to pay for it. This matter of attitude is another one of the great differences between the breeder and the puppy-raiser.

When the Breeder sells or disposes of a dog, whether very young or grown, he is parting with something that is much more than what it looks to be in the eyes of the prospective buyer. The buyer sees a beautiful specimen of the breed--healthy, sound and a look of quality. The breeder sees all these things, but a great deal more. To him, the dog represents years of hard work-- often menial work-- years full of excitement, exultation and disappointments. He does not merely see the beauty in the individual dog before him, but a long line of ancestors, dogs that he knew and loved and that went into the making of this particular individual. When the Breeder looks at an animal he has bred, his view has an extra dimension-- he sees that dog in DEPTH.

The Breeder Carefully Screens Prospective Buyers

He knows that changes of ownership can have a traumatic effect on a dog, especially if there are several of them. The dog becomes confused and loses his sense of security, an absolute necessity if he is to have confidence. This situation is as disastrous to a dog as it is to a child, in fact more so because there is no way to explain to a dog what is taking place.

From the standpoint of the breeder, the ideal one-dog owner is a pearl beyond price. The more such people he can enable to possess his dogs, the more successful he will become as a Breeder, and the more successful he is as a Breeder the more likely he is to have more good dogs than it is practical for him to keep. Unlike the puppy-raiser who breeds his bitches every season and often has several litters at a time, the breeder rarely breeds his bitches more than three or four times in a lifetime, and sometimes not even that many. The expenses of maintaining his dogs year after year are exorbitant, and coupled with this never-ceasing drain on his resources is the gnawing awareness that even though they get the best of food, veterinarian care, and love, he cannot possibly give them the advantages which would be theirs in the case of the ideal one-dog ownership. For this reason, he is usually reluctant to sell to other breeders, feeling that the dog would not be bettered by the change of homes where it would still be one of many. He can give each dog he owns everything that money can buy and his limitations of his can allow - he can literally give the dogs his entire house, and all his furniture - piece by piece! But the only thing he cannot give is the important feeling of being # 1 dog in the household, and the chance for constant exposure to the outside world.

The Puppy-Raiser Rarely Asks Questions

If the buyer wants a dog and has the money to pay for it, he has met the only requirements necessary to take possession of the dog.

But the Breeder's attitude is very different. The Breeder not only asks many questions to which he must get the right answers or he will not sell the dog--he must also know something of the buyer's background. What dogs did he have before? How old were they when he got them, and what eventually happened to them? What were the things that he liked about each one and what were the things that annoyed him? From these answers, the Breeder will have to determine what kind of dog-owner this buyer has been, and what kind he is likely to be. Did he have only one dog who lived to be 13 or 14 or more, or did he have several dogs, each of which he disposed of for a variety of reasons. Obviously, the latter buyer is going to be a bad risk. He is like the car driver who has many accidents, none of which he believes to be his fault.

When considering a buyer, the breeder must project his thinking into the future. He must decide whether the germs of future trouble are lurking in the buyer's present situation and thinking. If a young man, is the buyer likely to go into the Army, or to college? If an older man, does his wife want this dog? If a bachelor, who will care for the dog if anything happens to him? What attitude does the buyer have toward his past disappointments? Does he blame everyone except himself? Is he the type of person who is always trying to get as much as possible for as little as possible? Would a really good dog be wasted on him?

To the extent that the breeder can make these evaluations successfully, he will save himself many future complications. No matter how many dogs he has, as long as his money and his health hold out, his dogs are a problem to him, but only a problem. The problems of keeping them well fed and comfortably housed may seem difficult at times, but they are not serious. In the hands of the wrong buyer, however, the dog becomes a hostage. Why?? Because the breeder cares. It could not matter to the puppy-raiser because he would not concern himself about such matters.

Regardless of how carefully he screens the buyers, the Breeder will still have occasional disappointments. Human nature being what it is, this is inevitable. Dogs will be returned to him-- and he will accept them-- not because of any fault in the dog, but because the buyer himself, or the conditions of his life, have changed.

What happens to These Dogs?

Few people realize the number of older dogs that live to the age of 13 or 14 in the homes of Breeders. In the business world, these dogs would be considered obsolete equipment and destroyed. But the Breeder's world is different. He recognizes a responsibility toward anything that he has brought into the world and takes care of it until the dog is dead-- or he is. If he can find the right person to sell or give it to, he does; but if he can not, he continues to keep it himself. The drain on the breeder's strength and finances is merciless. Occasionally, when faced with severe illness or drastically reduced income, he may have to decree that some or all of his dogs be put to sleep. And even this costs money. When a breeder makes this decision, few people understand it.

The general public and those who have never known the responsibility which goes with more than one or two dogs will probably regard this as cruelty. But, as previously stressed, the Breeder has a responsibility for whatever he brings into the world until it goes out of it. If the dog is in the wrong hands, he must try to get it back, and then either keep it or see that it is put into the right hands. If the Breeder is no longer able to do this, there is only one way he can be sure his dogs will never know hunger or abuse. That is euthanasia. To the breeder who loves his dogs, there is no more tragic decision he will ever have to make. when he himself is faced with incapacitating ill health, or even death, he must recognize the cold hard facts regarding the future of his dogs. Without his guiding hand and sense of responsibility, the dogs are much better off dead. A breeder will make any sacrifice to avoid this situation, but when it arises, he will do what he knows is necessary. Why? because he is a Breeder and feels responsibility towards his animals

Now, what of the Breeder's Responsibility to His Breed?

A successful breeder usually becomes something of a public figure. He may be requested to write about his breed, to speak about it, to judge it.

His relationship to his breed is something very different. As a judge and as a writer, he must be completely objective. Indeed, he must bend over backwards to achieve this impartiality.

The breeder's responsibility to his breed does not permit him to use opportunities either in judging or writing to exploit his own stock. He is abrogating this responsibility to the breed, not to mention considerations of good taste, if he uses a magazine's breed column to promote his own breeding, or in judging to favor the same. He can make known his bloodlines and his winning through the paid advertisements, providing they are honest and factual, but never uses the public space to get free publicity. When the breeder writes for the public, he is representing his breed, not himself or his stock, and it is this broader perspective that sets apart the true Breeder with a sense of responsibility from the commercial one whose only consideration is to promote his wares.

A Breeder has Great Care for the Public Image of His Breed

He tries to inoculate these values in the people to whom he sells his dogs, and in everyone with whom he comes in contact. He is reluctant to criticize what he considers the shortcomings of other Breeders, or to fault the products of their handiwork. He scorns high pressure salesmanship and the advertising techniques of Madison Avenue. Giving straightforward answers to the people who have bought, or are about to buy, his own stock, he neither glosses over the faults more makes exaggerated claims or predictions. He is forthright in his thinking, his talking, his actions. People instinctively trust him, not because he asks for their trust, (which he does not) but because of what he is.

The real Breeders are the heart and soul of the dog world. They stand proud and often alone, resisting commercialism, never denied in their search for perfection and idealistic in their code of ethics.