**GET WHAT YOU’RE PAYING FOR!!!!!**

**(Or How to Find a Good Breeder, OR Avoid**

**Buying a Pup from a Puppy Mill!)**

I went to a dog show recently, and a fellow kennel club member asked me if I would take the time to introduce myself to a lady who lives maybe 15 minutes from me who was showing her very first standard poodle, for the first time, and give her a few words of encouragement. I said I would.

Well, I got to the rings in plenty of time to see Standards show, looked her up in the Premium List to see what I could find out about her dog, and was surprised and disappointed to see that her dog came from a commercial breeding operation – not a true puppy mill in the stereotypical horror image you see in the news, but definitely a commercial breeding operation purely for profit. So I waited in hopes that she might have gotten lucky and actually got a nice dog from them. That didn’t happen!

To anyone who knows their poodles, it was so obvious that her dog was pet, not show, quality and should never have been in the show ring. I suspect that she figured that out herself before the show weekend was over, at least I hope so. The really sad part is that anywhere in the southeast, you can find a true show quality pup from some of the best breeders in the southeast for a range of $1800 to $2500, and I know that she paid $2500-$3500 for this puppy according to the contract on the breeder’s site, for a pup that is definitely not show quality. The tail on this poor baby was barely 3” long! And that was just one of the flaws.

Please do your homework – don’t just buy a puppy from someone after a one minute look at cute dogs on the website – spend the time to go through the website, read the history, read about what they do for their dogs in the way of genetic health testing, how the puppies are raised, what age are they when they let them go to new homes, are they microchipped, what vaccinations will they have received before they leave, what kind of health guarantee comes with the dog, what deposit is required and when, is that deposit refundable and under what circumstances. Can you visit the facility before making a deposit to see how both the puppies and adults are housed – is it clean, spacious, do you see any water dishes that are empty and dry, etc. Can you get a copy of the purchase agreement, and copies of the health testing on the sire/dam before making a deposit? Do you choose your own puppy (and what guarantee do you have that when you come to pick it up, it’s actually the one you chose?)?

The operation she got her puppy from has over 50 breeding bitches shown on their site! And more than 150 puppies “available”!!! There is no individual information on health testing on the bitches or sires. They do not detail the testing they do, and even go so far as to say that some of the testing that good breeders perform is just to be on AKC’s “good side”, and isn’t really necessary. The videos on their site show a mom and a litter of puppies in a kennel that looks to be about 6X6, and there are many of these – where the pups are kept until they are old enough to go to a larger space – a bigger kennel. These puppies are not raised in a home environment, socialized, or pampered in any way. I would expect them to be people shy and kennel shy, afraid of the big outdoors and probably their own shadows.

Don’t buy a puppy from a puppy mill or a commercial operation like this one, where the adults are bred frequently, with no research into what’s a good breeding and what isn’t, breeding mostly for color and size, and money. You may think “well, at least I’m rescuing one puppy from a terrible place” but remember that every puppy they sell simply is one more enabling them to stay in business!!!!!

Things you SHOULD look for from a breeder –

* A website that shows clearly the quality of the dogs – good grooming, properly docked tails, etc.
* Pedigrees that give a good indication of well-bred predecessors (more champions in the pedigree than not)
* When you talk to the breeder, ask about testing – do you get copies, or can the breeder point you to OFFA to see what testing has been done on the dog
* Ask what health problems has the breeder’s dogs ever produced - - I don’t know a single honest, reputable breeder that will say “none!” If you breed, you ***will*** have a health issue crop up from time to time. The gene pool is too small not to. Testing is what we do to minimize the risk of producing serious hereditary issues.
* Will the puppies be microchipped? How old are they before they can go home? What vaccinations will they have had? Puppies should be able to go home around 9 weeks, with the first puppy shot, first Bordetella (kennel cough), and 2-3 wormings. Never bring a puppy home at 6 weeks!!! It’s even illegal in some states to sell a puppy that young!
* Can you get advance copies of the purchase contract, the health guarantee?
* Can you visit the breeder and meet the puppies? And the sire and dam if they are on site (many times, you meet only the dam, as the sire may have been from another breeder)
* Ask the breeder about support and advice after the sale – will they answer the phone and return emails if you have questions about anything, for the life of the dog!?
* Ask for references – If the breeder asks YOU for references, they should certainly be willing to give you references – people who have their puppies, their vet(s), etc.
* Ask about their vaccination protocols – today, more is definitely NOT better!!! Only two puppy vaccinations, and an optional 3rd at 18 weeks that is for parvo only. Rabies as late as you can get away with it with a cooperative vet – preferably around 20 weeks. Rabies and regular vaccinations are now both 3 yr shots, and many states now allow you to do titers to check immunity so that shots are only given if they are actually needed.

Your puppy should come home with you bathed, lightly groomed, with clean ears. Their eyes should be clear and free of any discharge. Nostrils should be clear. The puppy should be happy and excited, not lethargic, and should come home to you with no diarrhea, no coughing, and with a good appetite. Find out what your pup has been fed, and I hope it’s a good middle of the road or higher grade all stages kibble. I send my puppies home with a litter pedigree, an AKC puppy package, several toys, a nice bag of kibble, and more information that you can shake a stick at! They are chipped, bathed, groomed, nails are done, ears are plucked. They have had their first shot and first kennel cough inoculation, they have received heartworm preventive and are also on flea/tick preventive when they leave. I still gladly answer the phone and emails from some of my puppy buyers whose dogs are now 10 yrs old or older! I even get calls from some owners who have pups from other breeders who won’t bother to return their calls! Sad! I will also, if you happen to live near enough, be happy to teach you how to bathe and groom your puppy (a basic lamb clip), and give you advice on what tools you need if you want to learn to groom your own dog. It’s not rocket science – you can do it! In the beginning, your only goal is not to hurt your dog, and laugh at yourself when you give him or her one of those “interesting haircuts”!

I’m just saying that buying a good poodle puppy is an investment. Would you buy a car from just a picture? No! You’re going to spend a lot of money on any dog over its lifetime – vet bills, grooming bills, license fees in some states, food, toys, boarding, training. DO YOUR HOMEWORK so you get the best and healthiest puppy you can from a breeder you like, trust, and respect!!!!! BE AN INFORMED, EDUCATED BUYER AND OWNER! Thanks for listening!