

SunHerald.com

Posted on Thu, Oct. 21.2004

BEFORE BUYING A DOG, MAKE SURE YOU'LL GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

It's a shame it happens, but it does. A person distraught over buying an alleged "purebred" or "healthy" puppy calls me up to tell me how they feel they've been taken by a seller – many times financially and emotionally.

These unfortunate circumstances can happen to intelligent, astute buyers when it comes to buying homes, automobiles or appliances. Yet, spur-of-the-moment emotions can sometimes cloud the buying process when it comes to buying that new puppy. Today I'll give three pieces of advice that will help anyone interested in buying a dog from making some common mistakes.

First of all, stay focused on what you're looking for. Before you read the newspaper classifieds, go online or visit the pet shops, make a decision as to the breed, gender and quality (breeding, show vs. pet) of the dog you're looking for. This will keep distractions to you minimal during your search process.

The AKC is helpful in not only defining breed standards, but also in keeping legitimacy to the breed bloodlines. In addition, just about all breeds of dogs now have their own club Web sites where information on breeds, breeders and their locations, and even chat rooms where a potential buyer can speak to established purebred owners.

In this Internet age, all purebreds have active rescue organizations too – taking "gems from the rough" from animal shelters and relocating them to areas where adopters or sponsors are waiting. Our clinic has worked quite a bit with the Weimaraner Rescue of the South group (www.weimrescue.com) and the Golden Retriever Rescue group (www.heartlandgoldenrescue.org). These folks do an amazing job of locating apparently lost purebreds to new homes.

Secondly, never pay a purebred price for a nonregistered dog. Here's the drill: There is AKC paperwork with an assigned number to the sire and dam of each litter that the AKC registers under a breed.

If a seller of a pup claims "purebred" pups but cannot produce AKC registration numbers of the sire and dam, then don't deal unless the seller is significantly discounting for nonregistered status.

There are a few breeds the AKC does not recognize, but the breed may be registered in the United Kingdom or Canada. Still, these registration papers should be produced prior to any sale, and not under the terms of "I'll mail them to you later." I have seen more people get burned over this single issue than any other in the purchase process.

Thirdly (and I must serve my profession here), keep your veterinarian in the loop. Rather than analyzing what went wrong later, try to avert problems up front by asking your veterinarian's advice before the search starts. Then, before any serious money changes hands, ask that a veterinarian inspect the puppy for congenital problems or illnesses. Your vet wants you to succeed, as your vet wants a longstanding relationship with you and your dog.

Most reputable breeders or sales establishments not only allow for this inspection (sometimes after a deposit) but also commonly provide warranties for up to seven to 10 days post-purchase. Never be afraid to ask about these steps being taken.

I must point out that not everyone is in search of a certain purebred puppy.

A pet quality dog that is not purebred can bring years of satisfaction for your family and can give a home to a dog who may be destined to an uncertain future at one of our local shelters. As a personal aside, I have a mixed breed dog.

For a modest price and a complimentary veterinary inspection, these shelter pups (and full-grown dogs) can be a win-win alternative for the shelter and the new owner.

If this option is attractive to you, call the Jackson County Animal Shelter at 497-6350, the Humane Society of South Mississippi at 863-3354 or the Waveland Animal Shelter at 467-0230.

Dr. Chris Duke is a veterinarian at Bienville Animal Medical Center in Ocean Spring. Questions for this column are encouraged. Write to South Mississippi Veterinary Medical Association, 2005 Pineville Road, Long Beach, MS 39560 and include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

NOTE: This was an article printed in a local paper in MS. You can also contact your local shelter or humane society for info on adopting dogs.