**Buying from a Preservation Breeder: What is the Process?**

*By Nannette Newbury, Stonepine Australian Shepherds*

You may have purchased a puppy from a breeder in the past; or perhaps this is your first time working with a breeder of purposefully bred dogs. Each breeder is different, but there are some typical steps that you might wish to be aware of.

* Preservation breeders are breeding for their own breeding program in an effort to preserve and protect the breeder for the future. Of course there are generally puppies left over after the breeder makes their selection. Some breeders share these with other breeders, show homes and/or well-qualified pet homes. For myself, I prefer and give preference to placing my puppies in loving, permanent pet homes.
* As a prospective buyer, you should be paying attention and focusing on the skills and knowledge of the breeder. NOT on cute puppy pictures. Some of the worst puppy mills/breeders have the most gorgeous websites. Do your homework. Puppy Finder and similar websites are fronts for less than savory breeding programs. No successful and qualified breeder needs to or would ever consider selling their puppies this way. If there is a number on the puppy photo you are in the wrong place! You want to find a breeder and develop a rapport with them. You should trust them; their knowledge and their breeding program. You want a breeder that will be available to assist for the life of the dog.
* Be aware that there are all kinds of breeders; from commercial puppy mills, backyard breeders, hobbyists, all the way up to master breeders. Unfortunately all breeders tend to get lumped into one pile which is unfortunate. But the other unfortunate thing in the world of dog breeding is the phenomena called “five-year wonders.” These are enthusiastic and well-meaning devotees of the fancy; they get involved in a big way…fast. And they are gone in five years. You wish to avoid these breeders as they will not be able to provide you help for the life of the dog. And their depth of knowledge and skill is negligible as well.
* So, you have cruised the internet or received glowing referrals for several breeders. While it may be convenient to learn about the breed and cruise the internet for breeders and then reach out to them via email, the actual sale will not happen this way. Be sure to reach out to the breeder. CALL THEM. You basically will want to interview the breeder. And they will wish to interview you as well.
* To reach me, fill out the contact form and send it to me. I will respond and we can set up a time to go through the process via the telephone. Be sure you have time. The person that is actually going to be the primary caregiver of the dog should be the caller or on the call.
* Reputable preservation breeders of purposefully bred dogs will not sell/place dogs during the holiday season, as Christmas and/or gifts.
* I suggest that the first question you ask a breeder, not be about price. This is very off-putting for a breeder. You should not be looking for “bargains” or “deals” when buying a dog. Focus on longevity, health and temperament. If you have not been to a veterinarians office lately, the cost of vet care will soon eclipse the cost of any puppy, no matter what you paid for it. For example, simple puppy vaccinations can run over $500 at some clinics. Of course you can find cheaper puppies, but I assure you, you will get just what you pay for…
* There are a myriad of reasons for the cost of a quality puppy. Mostly it is time and costs associated with having high-quality sires and dams. This includes health clearances and testing. This is not a for-profit business I assure you. Most preservation breeders consider it a passion and if you are doing things right, there is rarely any profit if at all.

“I do not want a show puppy.” I hear this all the time and truthfully, yes you do. As preservation breeders we have a set and specific breed standard that dictates movement, temperament, colors, shape of the eye and ear, the look of the head and importantly breed type. You want to buy a puppy that looks and acts like an Australian Shepherd. You can look at our breed standard here:

(images.akc.org/pdf/breeds/standards/AustralianShepherd.pdf)

* The most important reason for looking for the quality of a show dog is simple. It moves properly. Dogs that do not move properly tend to have improper skeletal alignment. This can cause long-term health issues, especially those related to bones, tendons, ligaments, etc. Asking for a quality puppy does not imply that you must keep it intact and show it. Far from it. It means you are looking for a dog that is built and bred to be healthy and live a long life free from pain.
* Typical Questions a Breeder will Ask You:
  + Where do you live? Do you own your own home?
  + Have you ever owned an Australian Shepherd before?
  + What attracted you to this breed?
  + Who does your family consist of? Kids, spouses, single, etc.
  + Do you own other dogs right now? If so, what breed and how old?
  + Is someone home during the day?
  + How are you prepared to meet the physical needs of the dog? Keep in mind this includes one of their passions…exuberant off leash running.
  + How are you prepared to provide adequate mental stimulation for this breed?
  + Where will the dog live/sleep?
  + Do you like to train dogs? Have you participated in a formal dog training class?
* Typical Questions You Should Ask a Breeder:
  + When did you breed your first litter of Australian Shepherds?
  + Do you have a mentor(s)?
  + Are you a member of any national breed clubs?
  + How do you participate and give back to the breed?
  + What is your purpose in breeding this litter?
  + What qualities are you looking to improve with this litter?
  + Are you keeping anything out of this litter?
  + What is the long-term focus of your breeding program
  + Can you give me some of your successes/failures in the breed?
  + Do you require a mandatory/spay neuter contract?
  + What registration papers come with this puppy?
  + What health clearances do you recommend for the sire and dam and for the puppies?
  + How did you select the sire/dam of this litter?
  + Feel free to ask for referrals from previous puppy owners.
* Do not be alarmed at some of the questions. The questions are not meant to be invasive or off-putting, but rather to determine if you, your family, your home will provide and environment for this breed to not survive, but to thrive in. For the Australian Shepherd this is a difficult task. As with many dog breeds, they are not for everyone.
* Keep in mind this breed was a tough, tenacious ranch dog up until about 40 or 50 years ago. It has only been in the last 20 years or so that they have become popular as pets. They were not bred as companion animals, but in order for them to survive in the future, they must be able to adapt. However it is important not to loose cite of their original purpose and function. They are a high-end highly intelligent working dog. The intelligence and energy levels do not diminish and can be quite daunting . This makes it a complicated puppy for most people to accommodate. This is certainly NOT a breed I ever recommend for a first-time dog owner.
* It is illegal to sell a puppy via the internet any longer. You must come to the site of the breeder and see your puppy in person. That is the law. I recommend that you select a breeder within close proximity to your home if possible.