The Ins and Outs of Buying an Australian Shepherd

*By Nannette Newbury*

Have you ever purchased a dog from a breeder before? This is the first question I ask clients when they call to discuss the breed and are considering bringing an Australian Shepherd into their home. And…most of the time the answer is “no.” The process of adding an Australian Shepherd into your home… a dog that has been bred by a preservation breeder with an impeccable reputation, can be daunting, mysterious, and downright overwhelming from the pet-owner perspective.

The follow are some tips and insights into the process so that when you have your first discussion with a breeder, you are well-informed and knowledgeable:

1. What is a Preservation Breeder? These are breeders who are passionately involved with the breed, often dedicating a lifetime to preserving and protecting the breed for future generations to enjoy. They do this by participating in their national breed club, ongoing and non-stop breed education, often times from a long-time breed mentor. Any litter bred is done so with copious pre-planning including appropriate genetic and physical health tests on both the sire and the dam.
2. Are litters being bred just “for sale?” Generally not. Purposely breed dogs from preservation breeders are first and foremost being bred for the breed and for the breeder. The thought being that this litter will further the improvements in that breeder’s program. Breeders will be keeping a puppy from this litter if their goals for the breeding have succeeded. There are generally extra puppies in any litter. Breeders wish these pups to go into the best possible homes to live a full, healthy and long life full of enrichment and love.
3. In order to do this, Breeders must “interview” prospective pet homes. This is an area that can cause friction between the potential new owner and the Breeder. Oftentimes the questions a Breeder may ask might appear invasive, irrelevant, or might even put you on the defensive. This is NOT the intent of the pre-purchase discussion.
4. The responsibility of the Breeder is to the puppy he/she has produced…for the life of that puppy. Therefore it is incumbent on the Breeder to take all steps possible to make sure that this puppy is a fit for you and your family, as well as a suitable home for the puppy. In this case the breeder is an being advocate for the puppy.
5. Every breed of dog has its good traits and less than desirable traits that will make it a good fit for you and your family or not. A reputable breeder will share with you in depth the good news and the bad news about the Australian Shepherd. If they do not, find another breeder.
6. Spend as much time in discussion with the breeder *before* you decide on the breed. Interview several breeders. Rather than buying a puppy I suggest that you “buy” the breeder. Select a breeder who is skilled, knowledgeable and willing to work with you for the life of the puppy. This is a long-term commitment and the time spent prior to getting your puppy will ensure success over the life of the dog.
7. Start your search early. Many people want to bring a new puppy into their home during the summer, when school is out. If you wait until June 1st to start your search you may be disappointed or worse, you may rush into a purchase that has little chance to succeed.
8. While the preservation breeder is willing to passionately talk for hours about the breed, you must also be willing to ask questions of the Breeder. Here are several that will assist you in finding the right breeder for you:
   1. When did you breed your first litter?
   2. Are you a member of your national breed club?
   3. How do you give back to the breed?
   4. Do you have a breed mentor?
   5. What are your short- and long-term goals in your breeding program?
   6. Why are you breeding this litter?
   7. What do you hope to accomplish with this litter?
   8. What information can you share with me to assist the long-term health and longevity for my puppy?
   9. May we come to visit the puppies when they are of an appropriate age?
   10. What is the selection process for purchasing a puppy from you?
9. Both parties want this transaction to be successful. It takes time and understanding on both sides to ensure future success. Take the time get to know your breeder. Select wisely. And stay in touch with your breeder. They can be a wealth of information throughout the life of the dog.