

Is it a Puppy Mill?

You've decided you want a puppy and will use the Internet to help you find the perfect dog for your family. How do you know if you're looking at a responsible breeder's web site or a possible online puppy mill or broker's web site? Keep in mind, commercial breeders (puppy mills) treat their dogs as livestock and are breeding for the sole purpose to make a profit. It is the focus on profit, not quality dogs, that is the distinguishing feature of a puppy mill. There are two ways to increase profit - increase production or cut costs.

Here are some tips to determine if you are looking at a mill or a broker's web site instead of that of a responsible breeder.

*Multiple breeds are the first indication. A good breeder rarely has more than two or possibly three breeds on which they focus their attention and energies. A lot of work goes into a well-bred dog.

*Availability of puppies. A responsible breeder rarely has puppies immediately available. If you find a site touting "Many puppies now available," think twice before deciding to buy. The only place you find multiple puppies on hand most or all of the time is a puppy mill or a pet store.

*All responsible breeders sell with a contract. If you are buying a pet, the contract should be for limited registration with a spay/neuter agreement. The contract protects not only you but also the dog. Good breeders are always watching out for their dogs. They are concerned about the pet population. They know the work and commitment that goes into raising quality dogs. They feel responsible and do not want to risk their puppy or its future offspring in less than reputable breeding practices. A good contract always specifies that in the event the owner cannot keep the dog, the breeder is to be notified so that arrangements can be made to take the dog back.



Tansy's right eye was ripped open from the wood and wire caging in which she was kept. She came into rescue with it horribly infected, having never received treatment for it. She is now blind in her right eye and needs daily drops because of the damage.

*The number of breeds available. If a site tells you they work with many different breeders, think twice. Good breeders do not sell their puppies through other people. They want to know who will be purchasing their puppies. They want to make the best decisions possible for their dogs' offspring. Multiple breeds and breeders on a web site suggest a broker is at work or that you've come upon a mill operation.

*Location says a lot. A reputable breeder NEVER sells to a pet store, auction or flea market. If the person selling the dog didn't breed it, do not buy it.



This is a picture of a puppy mill in Wisconsin. Notice the "shelter" of one board for protection from the elements. <http://www.egressetch.com/WisconsinPFL/>

*Advertisement of mixed breeds, particularly when they're touted as being healthier simply because of their mixed breed heritage, is a sign of a commercial breeder. Hybrid vigor is an old and flawed argument. Mixed breeds are just as likely to have genetic impairments as purebred dogs. What is important is the health testing done for the parents prior to breeding.

*Age matters. A good breeder never allows their puppies to leave their mother before at least 8 weeks of age. Even if a puppy is weaned, they are learning about social behavior from their mother. Bite inhibition is an important lesson missed by puppies in a pet store or from a backyard breeder that takes puppies away from their mother before 8 weeks of age. Puppies need to be with their mother to learn about the world.



Dewey, a Havanese, was horribly matted when rescued from a mill. He was painfully thin under all those lumps of fur.

*No information on health testing or a simple statement that all puppies are "healthy and guaranteed" is a sign of a possible mill or broker. Ask for specifics on what the guarantee means. Never trust somebody who tells you their breed has no problems. All breeds have genetic predisposition to some diseases and/or congenital conditions. What is important is the health testing done for the parents prior to breeding. Information on testing should be stated and the results made available to you before purchase.

*The registry used tells you a great deal about a breeder. In the U.S., puppies should be registered with AKC (American Kennel Club), UKC (United Kennel Club), the ARBA (American Rare Breed Association) or the foreign registries - the CKC (Canadian Kennel Club) or FCI (Federation Cynologique Internationale). These registries do not guarantee a good breeder or a well-bred dog, but unlike many other registries, they represent stricter standards. Many registries were started after the AKC instituted the Frequently Used Sires (FUS) requirement which requires DNA certification of a male dog used to sire more than 7 litters in his lifetime. Some litters have been turned down by the AKC because of violation of this requirement and many other breeders are boycotting AKC as they cannot, or will not, meet AKC's more stringent requirements for breeders.

Some examples of alternative registries that should set off alarms that you are not dealing with a responsible breeder include:

ACA (American Canine Association)

APR (American Purebred Registry)

APRI (America's Pet Registry Inc.)

ARU (Animal Registry Unlimited)

CKC (Continental Kennel Club)

FIC (Federation of International Canines)

USKC (United States Kennel Club)

WKC (World Kennel Club)

WWKC (World Wide Kennel Club)

Please note that some of the registries have similar or the same initials as the older and well established registries. This can cause confusion for consumers. Don't be fooled.

*Does the breeder breed to the breed standard? The breed standard is what makes a Pug a Pug or a Miniature Schnauzer a Miniature Schnauzer. A good

breeder knows the standard and participates to some degree in the conformation world (dog shows) to know where their dogs stand in relationship to the breed standard. Do your research (<http://akc.org> is a good place to start) to see what the breed standard is for the breed in which you're interested. Don't be fooled by a web site's claim that they are selling a rare color, size or marking. Standards are there for a purpose. Advertising of dogs that fall outside the standard is a ploy utilized by those who are not able to meet the standards defined.

We hope this information has been helpful to you in determining whether you are looking at the web site of a responsible breeder or a possible commercial breeder (puppy mill) or broker. You may request a master copy of this information for publication in brochure format and the other materials on choosing a responsible breeder and what is a puppy mill by contacting the owner of this site for the mailing address and sending one dollar to cover postage.

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