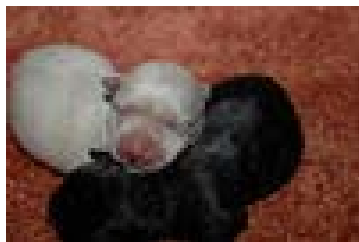


So You Want to Pick a Puppy - Pick Your Breeder First

By Vandra L. Huber, PhD¹

Finding a good breeder is not always easy. After reading up on the breed, acquiring a working knowledge of type, temperament and health, you can then begin your quest for a breeder you can work with. Begin your search for a responsible breeder by contacting national breed clubs. These are often referenced at your Library. You may also contact the American Kennel Club for a list of information officers for specific breeds. Attending a local dog show in your area can provide a wealth of information. The show catalog lists the names and addresses of exhibitors. Newspaper advertisements may or may not yield the names of reputable, knowledgeable breeders. Some quality breeders advertise in the paper. They like to place their pet puppies locally and they find the newspaper a good way to find responsible local owners. Remember, however, that the newspaper is also the key advertising source for backyard breeders and over-bred puppy mill puppies. A trend among puppy mill brokers is to hire local folks to pose as breeders and sale puppies in their employee's home.



Don't stop when you have the name of one breeder. Get more names. And regardless of the source of breeder names, you still have to screen them. It's up to you -- not a breed club, not the American Kennel Club, not the neighbor down the street -- to find the "right" breeder of your puppy. Finding the right breeder and the right puppy for you will take time -- as long as year. So be patient. The wait is worth it when you consider your Scottish companion will be with you for 12 to 15 years. A responsible breeder will screen you carefully to insure that you are right for her Scotties. You should do likewise. It is worth waiting for a good dog from a responsible breeder. Below are listed a series of questions that can help you screen breeders.

1. **What is your background in Scottish Terriers (any breed) ? In breeding Scottish Terriers (any breed) ?**

Conscientious breeders typically will belong to a local and national breed club (e.g., The Scottish Terrier Club of America). It is through organizations such as this that they acquire knowledge and education. They may also be involved in obedience, go to ground trials or agility.

Probe deeply as to the depth and breadth of their knowledge. Ask for the name and telephone number of the local club's and national clubs corresponding secretary to verify members. However, membership in a breed club does not guarantee that the breeder is ethical and responsible but it is more likely that the breeder is. Backyard breeders have little or no experience in the breed (e.g. this is our first or second litter). Brokers aren't involved directly with a breed. Their objective is to move dogs and make a profit.

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2. Does the breeder abide by the code of ethics of the national breed club?

First, the breeder should be aware of the standards and be able to share them with you. [Scottish Terrier Club of America's code of ethics](#) includes guidelines regarding the age at which bitches are bred and genetic screening and the disclosure of any known or possible genetic ailments. Remember, breed clubs promote ethical behavior but they can not guarantee that a specific person will behave ethically.

3. What is your breeding philosophy?

Look for answers which indicate that breeder is concerned with producing sound, healthy and conformational correct Scottish Terriers (any breed). They should also indicate that they breed their bitches no younger than 18 months or the third season and seldom breed them back to back. These answers indicate thoughtfulness in their approach to breeding. They should clearly indicate that never sell to pet stores or whole sale the dogs.

4. May I have a five generation pedigree?

Check to see that there are specific lines of dogs mentioned repeatedly. You should see some champions and you want information about health checks (e.g. OAF numbers, VWD numbers, colors). BEWARE of pedigrees with lots of simple names (e.g. Blackie of Blackwatch, McDuff of Downbee). Beware of pedigrees in which the name of the breeder is not mentioned but a transfer agency is listed as owner. Some responsible breeders use a post office box to protect against dog nappers. Be careful if no telephone number is listed or if they will not allow you to visit their kennel. Care is particularly needed in the states where puppy mills thrive. Remember, many puppy mills now contract with local families who serve as hosts to the dogs and "pretend" to have bred the scotties.

5. What do you see as the major health concerns of Scottish Terriers (any breed)? In your line?

The for-profit or backyard breeder will only be able to describe concerns in general (and will indicate that they have no concerns in their line). The knowledgeable breeder will give you a realistic picture of health concerns. They should mention VWD, Thyroid, Scotty cramp, skin allergies, epilepsy. The knowledgeable breeder will inform you about specific health concerns in the dogs you are considering purchasing. Minimally, you want to know the sire and dam's VWD scores and thyroid scores. You should ask about skin allergies and epilepsy in the line.

BEWARE the breeder who says they have no problems. They are snowballing you and/or themselves. They also may be selling their puppies at too young of an age for ailments to manifest themselves.

6. Tell me about the sire and dam. Ages? Number of times bred? VWD, thyroid scores? Scotty cramp, seizures, skin allergies?

They should be able to tell you the history of the each. Minimally VWD and thyroid checks should have been conducted. Ask if either has produced puppies with Scotty cramp and/or CMO, epilepsy. Beware the breeder who indicates no health problems.

7. Why did you mate this particular dog and bitch?

The puppy mill, puppy and pet store folks will not be able to articulate a reason. The casual breeder or back-yard-breeder will breed two dogs together because they are

geographically convenient, because they think their female will settle down more after having a litter (no basis for this belief), or because they think their female has such a sweet personality she deserves to be bred. The backyard or home-business breeder will make comments like "I just wanted to produce a nice litter. "He had a sweet personality." "My friends just wanted a puppy or two." "I feel I am fulfilling a need in the market for reasonably priced puppies without the strings attached by a show breeder. None of these are the right reasons to breed.

The show breeder will have carefully chosen the sire and dam because the complement one another in type, because they are attempting to minimize faults, and because they are attempting to maximize health. They will have considered VWD scores, thyroid and lineage match. For example, they will not breed two dogs with low VWD scores (below 50) or when one is a carrier and the other is marginal (score 50-70).

8. Can I meet the sire and dam?

Minimally, you should be able to meet the dam. Watch her attitude towards her puppies. Look at her overall appearance and health. It is not always the case that you can meet the sire. The right stud dog usually is not the neighbor's dog. If the stud dog lives elsewhere, ask for the name, address and telephone number of the owner. Call them and ask the same questions you asked about the dam. Insure you have a picture of the sire as well as his registration number. Ask how many litters he has sired in addition to the current one.

9. Why are you willing to sell this particular puppy?

They should be able to articulate their reasons. Is it just to supplement their income? Is it a major source of income? Most reputable breeders seldom make money off of their puppies. Reasoning may relate to the confirmation of the dogs (kink in tail, a crooked tooth, too long in loin, don't like the movement) and/or genetic/ health concerns (suffers from Scotty cramp). The difference here is that the buyer knows in advance about the breeder's concerns and therefore can make an informed decision.

10. Can they evaluate the puppies and tell you WHY a puppy is show quality or companion quality?

They should be able to articulate specific reasons. If the puppy is younger than five months (before all their permanent teeth are in), NO BREEDER can guarantee that a puppy is show quality. They could indicate it is a show potential. Remember, however, if the breeder has little or no experience in the show ring or can not recount the standard, then they are not able to make such a determination. If you examine the pedigree of the dog and see no champions, it is less likely that your puppy will be show potential.

11. In terms of these puppies, do you have a health record on the puppies?

You want a current health record on the puppies including vaccinations to date and recommendations for future vaccinations.

12. May I contact your veterinary regarding the health of these puppies and your dogs in general?

They should provide you with the telephone number and be willing to let you talk privately with the veterinarian.

13. Could you give me the names and telephone numbers of several people you have sold puppies to in the past three years that I can contact?

Contact these people before buying your puppy and talk in earnest with them about their experience. You may also want to contact other breeders and ask about the person. Beware if other recognized breeders have never heard of the breeder or if they make comments such as "she never backs up her dogs."

14. Do you feel as if you will be dealing with a knowledgeable Scottie (any breed) person, that can provide or find answers that will help you? Will they help you with show grooming? Can they give you information on regional clubs and fun activities for your dog and you, if you so desire?

A conscientious breeder will endeavor to the best of her ability to illuminate the prospective owners on the feeding, care, grooming, house training, housing, exercise and specific requirements of the breed in question. The educational process will be on-going, rather than ending, when the puppy leaves its birth home. Knowledgeable breeders have lots of information available and like to share it. They view their job as much as educating the buyer as placing puppies. And they provide a long-term safety net. You can call them at anytime regarding your puppy.

15. Is the breeder willing to guarantee the temperament and health of the dog (provided the buyer has given proper socialization, inoculations, diet and care) IN WRITING with a signed contract (not a bill of sale)?

A conscientious breeder will put in writing the above guarantee and show and explain it to the prospective purchaser before the sale of any puppy. This should be in the form of a contract which would be signed by both parties as a legal agreement

- a) **Grace period or trial ownership period.** People can and do make mistakes. The responsible breeder will include a clause in the contract that allows you to try the puppy out for a specified period of time. If things do not work out, then the breeder wants the puppy back and will take it back no questions asked.
- b) **Return policies.** You should be able to return the puppy at any time. This does not mean you will get all your money back but the contract should spell out what happens if it is returned (e.g. replacement puppy, money returned after puppy is placed, money returned minus placement expenses).
- c) **Provisions on neutering and spaying.** If the dog is not to be shown or used in a planned breeding program, the dog should be spayed or neutered. The conscientious breeder will make this determination based on the soundness of the animal rather than a personal desire for a puppy back or the desires of the new owner to recoup the cost of their new puppy. The American Kennel Club allows dogs to be sold on a limited registration which means that no offsprings of the animal can be registered with AKC.
- d) **Breeding provisions.** The responsible breeder will exercise some control over who the puppy is breed to and when it is breed. This ranges from consultation to personally selecting the mate. Since a breeder typically has more information available, this provision protects the buyer from breeding into a problem line. Beware of the breeder who requires you to give a puppy back out of a bitch for the remainder of the dog's life. This is excessive. Typically, a breeder will require a puppy back if you have paid a fee for the dog and may require two-three puppies if no cash was exchanged.

- e) **Conditions on showing.** No one can guarantee to that a puppy will become a champion or that it is a show dog. This is particularly true if the puppy is sold before its permanent teeth come in at around 5 months. At best, the breeder can indicate it has show potential or has to date, acquired a specific number of points towards its championship.
- f) **Co-ownership.** If the dog is to be co-owned, the contract should clearly specify the terms and conditions of the co-ownership (e.g. co owned until dog completes its championship and puppy back clause is fulfilled). Make sure the co-ownership rights are clearly stated. We recommend against co-ownerships. In one recent case, there was no contract. The dog was sold, the breeder's name was put back on the dog so it could be shown. When it became time to sign off on the dog, the breeder refused. With no contract, the only redress is legal.
- g) **Health Testing of Parents.** The STCA recommends that all Scottish Terriers – particularly those used for breeding – be tested for von Willibrands, subluxated patellas and either eyes via CERF or thyroid. We also recommend that they be tested for hip dysplasia and legg-calve-perthes. There are just too many movement problems in the breed to not rule out these ailments. BEFORE you buy, get copies of the health tests performed on the parents of your puppy. Don't listen to the breeder who says that this or that is no longer a problem in the breed or in their line. Health issues exist in ALL lines.
- gh) **Health guarantees.** A conscientious breeder, will provide a health record of the puppy, with evidence of the inoculations and wordings. The puppies will have had at least two sets of puppy shots. The health record should also indicate suggested dates of the continuance of these treatments. They will not place a puppy before at least 8 weeks of age and preferable 12 weeks. The additional month gives the breeder time to evaluate the puppy's temperament and to spot health concerns. If the puppy is show potential, then it is useful to wait until the puppy's permanent teeth have come.
- h) **AKC registration numbers of sire and dam.** A conscientious breeder will provide without request pedigrees of both the sire and the dam to the prospective buyer, prior to the purchase of the puppy. Additionally, the conscientious breeder will have the puppy's blue slip available at time of purchase.

In sum, you want a conscientious breeder. This is a person who has all health certifications, who has kept the puppies long enough to insure they are well protected against diseases, selects a stud with care not for convenience, who strives to improvement the breed, who lists the guarantees that come with purchasing a puppy, who informs you about potential health problems in the breed and in a specific line, who puts in writing what the options are should a genetic fault cause a serious problem for the dog. Conscientious breeders may or may not show their dogs. Regardless, their goal is to breed the best DOG possible (genetically and conformational) and to provide the buyer with a long term safety net of advice and assistance.