

Getting A Puppy! By Bryan Taylor

Well here it is a month and a bit into 2005 the start to another great year with our dogs and other loved ones. In our household we have just had a litter born Jan. 30 and we have six healthy pups--five black and one yellow--4 male 2 female. Majic is doing fine now after we had to take four by C section. So it would be a natural topic for this column is ---PUPPY SELECTION. Making the correct selection can lead to a great retriever and companion with the least amount of frustration and perhaps no disappointment.

The first and most important point to consider is that one must not pick a puppy first but rather a breeder., then a litter, then a puppy. The way to pick a breeder is to check the reputation of said breeder and evidence of healthy genetically clear breed stock and lines that match your expectations of the type of retriever your lifestyle will match - i.e.--hunting, obedience, ring or combination of all.

Genetics determine the reaction the dog is likely to have to its environment, as well as, confirmation and soundness. Genes are the building blocks of heredity and are passed from parents to offspring in a predictable manner. This topic can quickly progress into a very lengthy discussion unsuitable for this column but one can count on knowing this--like begets like.

The only way to gain predictability of traits is to seek an experienced breeder with proven bloodlines which produce successful progeny. This will usually involve some form of line breeding. Once a successful combination is found a breeder follows that line down the line as it were. Consider, too, there is of ten considerable difference between litter mates in ability, temperament, and tractability as one might find between separate litters within a breed.

The chance factor remains, but the odds improve if the buyer:

1. buys from established, reputable breeders who know their business.
2. buys pups from breeders who specialize in producing the type of retriever they desire.
3. buys pups produced by excellent gundog parents who have produced proven progeny from previous matings.

OTHER POINTERS

: Select breeders that maintain high standards for health an appropriate hip/eye/elbow certifications and who offer reasonable guarantees against health defects.

: Select litters with strong mother lines. Dams should be trained hunting dogs and she/they should possess the qualities you desire in your dog, not just in the sire. Dams project more influence on the litter than the sire. Genetic inheritance is of course 50/50 from both parents, but mom has the pups with her for 6 weeks and her influence is paramount. Good bitches are seldom mated to poor dogs yet the opposite frequently occurs.

: Don't pick litters based solely on the number of titles in the pedigree. These are impressive achievements to be sure, but they are not indicators of natural tractability, temperament, and game finding ability. Evaluate parents of pups based upon gundog standards important to your needs and their demonstrated ability to produce good pups.

GENETICS CAN INFLUENCE NATURAL GIFTS SUCH AS;

CALM temperament	tractability
marking	nose
retrieving desire	soft mouth
love of water	birdiness
intelligence	natural delivery to hand

AVOID NEGATIVE HEREDITY TRAITS SUCH AS;

hyperactivity	shyness--gun, call, man, etc.
hard mouth	aggressiveness
excessive toughness	dominance

Positive genetic traits, accompanied by soundness and health, should be the goal of your purchase, not just confirmation, color, titles or size. Inherited gundog traits are what you really should be paying for in a pup. Hope this helps all of you out there looking for a pup this year--I know it has me.

As we approach training our pups or even our older dogs we often forget caution when it come to water introduction--the following is a little jog in the right direction I believe.

INTRODUCING PUPS TO WATER

Restrict water introduction to the warmer months--not when the ice has just left the surface. Although around here it is difficult to get actual warmer water you know what I mean. For there is not a surer way to sour a puppy on it than to shove the youngster into an icy pond in mid-April or December. Take it as gospel that if you get a retriever pup during the winter, you should hold off on exposing it to water until late spring or better yet summer. On the whole, young dogs should be kept away from cold water--or at least intensive cold water workouts--until their drive and enthusiasm for water is high. and eve then they should be gradually introduced to it. A few negative episodes in icy water can quickly shift a youngster's water retrieving attitude from good to very bad. Quite a few trainers follow the 55 degree rule. That is they don't train in water when its temperature falls below 55 degrees. The point is to err on the side of caution. Youngsters must learn the ins and outs of retrieving under the most favourable conditions possible.

If there is a commonality amongst us dog sorts, other than love of our animals, it's a passion for talking about them. So over the course of the last couple of years I have had my share of questions and here are the most frequently asked four and my shot at answering them.

Should my Dog Heel to the Left?

If healing your dog on the right works for you don't change. The only mistake we make by teaching the dog to heel on the right side is we violate the norm. The main point is your dog should walk under control on whichever side you want.

That said, heeling on the left is practical for most of us as we are right handed and carry their guns in the dominant hand.

How much water is enough?

How much water does a hunting dog require? Hunting dogs should be well hydrated at all times. They should have access to fresh cool water to replenish their needs when they need it. You can ensure this is the case when you are in a field by carrying bottles with you and during more strenuous hunts you can mix water with their food as well. When traveling away from home for any time bring water from your normal water source with you enough to cover the length of stay never rely on standing water or puddle water as it probably will contain contaminants of some time or other.

My Dog is Eating His/Her Stool

Stool eating is quite common amongst dogs--although we find it disgusting dogs do not. Nonetheless stool eating should not be allowed to continue in our adult dogs. Among other things it can cause disease and parasitic infection if carried over to eating stool of other dogs. Stool eating can result from a number of factors from poor digestion to boredom. If your dog persists in doing this continually have a blood and stool sample workup done.

Should I have my puppy's dew claws removed?

Dewclaws are vestigial digits or toes--some people refer to them as thumbs--that over evolutionary time lost their original purpose. In other words excess baggage and should be removed as puppies around the third day. After that time the nerve has developed and it becomes pretty painful to do without surgery. Unless they become a problem most owners leave them on but if yours is an active hunting dog the position of the dewclaws will become snagged or ripped sooner if not later so get them removed sooner than later.

So we come to an end of this column--time to go walk the dog. Hope we have shed some light and until our next column - "may good training and great hunting come your way!"