

Locating A Puppy by Rene Sauser

Introduction to Type and the Role Breed History Plays in its Development

Prospective pet owners often, after having determined the breed of dog they wish to get, logically take the next step of trying to find out where to get their dog from. Pet sources for the most part can be generally divided into the following: reputable breeders; backyard breeders; pet shops (via puppy mills); and the local animal shelter. I have listed the sources from best to worst in chances of acquiring an emotionally and physically sound, well-bred companion for life. Before I explain each source and the pros and cons of acquiring a pet that way let us examine the term breed "type".

"Type" is what makes a Keeshond a Keeshond, or a Dalmatian a Dalmatian. Type is everything, from the typical temperament of a certain breed to the typical coat pattern, ear set, or gait. Certainly, the single biggest argument, really the only good reason for spending the extra money to buy a purebred dog is type. Type is what allows a particular breed of purebred dog to be predictable as to appearance, attitude, health, etc. If you don't care what your dog grows up to look like, act like, or move like, then there is no real reason to buy a purebred dog. Presumably however, the reason you are reading this article at all is because you know you want to get a "breed" of dog. The reason you want this "breed" of dog, the Keeshond, is because this "breed" is "good with small children, is an excellent warning barker, will generally not attack strangers, doesn't need a large yard, is a good house dog, is intelligent and alert in expression, has relatively few known congenital disorders, has an average life span of 12-15 years, weighs between 32 and 45 pounds, is 17-18 inches tall, and has a handsome cream, silver, gray and black odor-free coat with unique markings" which you find attractive. The closer a particular dog comes to satisfying all of the descriptive parts of the breed standard, the "typier" we say that dog is. Breed type is developed by selectively breeding those animals which are most typical of the breed and eliminating those which are not. By familiarizing ones self with the historical development of the breed, one can more easily understand why certain characteristics were chosen for while others were selectively eliminated.

For instance, many Keeshond were developed as companions to children on the Dutch barges. To be a good children's companion a dog would have to be friendly, playful, active, sensitive and intelligent. Such a dog should have a protective coat to allow it to not only tolerate the cool damp weather encountered on a Dutch barge but also all the hair pulling and finger poking that little kids tend to subject family pets to. A particularly good dog would be one that would warn of approaching strangers and bark to warn when a child fell overboard. Such a dog would need to be nimble, not so big as to get in a barge captain's way on the narrow decks, and a dog that did not require a lot of room to run. Such a dog would need a sense of humor and love to play games to amuse the children. The dog eventually became a good luck charm, no barge was complete without one. Such a dog would have a sense of pride, an upright carriage, a handsome coat, something a barge captain could brag about. Such a dog would need to be courageous and outgoing, greeting the barge's frequent visitors at docking time. Keeshonds which did not meet these basic requirements would be discarded. These dogs would not be considered to be a good Keeshond, therefor they would not be bred. Back then the purpose of breeding a Keeshond litter would be to acquire a new barge dog, not to make money selling to pet shops.

Now let's look at another breed developed for an entirely different purpose. The Chesapeake Bay Retriever, developed in North America in the region of the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland. Obviously the dog had to be a retriever...but why is the Chessie different from say the Labrador Retriever? Once again, to understand that, we need to look at the breed's history, and in particular the historical differences between the Labrador and the Chesapeake which affected the selection of one individual over another.

The Labrador Retriever was an English-developed breed. In Britain, at the time the Labrador breed was being developed, only wealthy land owners, aristocrats, were allowed to hunt and therefor only wealthy land owners had need of a hunting dog. These landowners could afford to own many dogs and had a

kennel and a kennel helper. Wealthy landowners did not have to work for their birds, generally they stood still and employees working as “beaters” would move through the brush to chase the game towards the hunter. The Labrador would sit quietly at the landowner’s side until commanded to retrieve the downed game. A dog which adapted well to being handled, rather than thinking and acting for itself, would be a plus. A dog that generally spent more time high and dry rather than braving the elements would have a short, easy care coat. A hunting dog’s color should not stand out so much as to frighten game away however when the game is driven, the dog does not necessarily need to completely camouflage with the surroundings, black, yellow and chocolate would all be acceptable colors for this. A dog in a kennel needs to be friendly and get along well with other dogs. Such a dog would need to have good field manners, responding to his master’s commands instantly and obediently. Such an animal would also be more handsome at the cost of some functionality as opposed to more functional at the cost of good looks.

The Chesapeake Bay Retriever, on the other hand, was the property of the poor, uneducated, less refined American riverman. In the days of the Chessy’s development, Chesapeake Bay rivermen made their living by supplying ducks to the markets and restaurants in the area. The rivermen constructed huge rafts on which they mounted punt guns. The guns were loaded with shrapnel and gun powder. Then, at night the raft was pushed out into the icy cold waters and when the riverman located a huge flock of ducks sitting in the bay, he would point and fire the gun, killing hundreds of ducks in a single night. His dog had the job of immediately, and without direction, retrieving all of the ducks. The dog often stayed in the water all night till the first rays of daylight appeared. The ducks were loaded into barrels and while his master went to sell his ducks, the dog was left to watch over his meager possessions - his raft and his gun. A good Chesapeake Bay Retriever would have to be extremely hardy and a very strong swimmer. His coat would need to be impervious to cold water. He too would need to be courageous but where the Keeshond and the Lab often accompanied their masters when meeting strangers, the Chessie was usually left at home to protect things. A friendly Chessie would not be good, the riverman could lose his entire livelihood to thieves. The Chessie had to be an independent worker, he had to have an uncommon sense of where to find his birds without direction, believe in his instincts and get the job done. Such requirements may explain why the Chessie is hard headed, often more difficult to teach hand signals to than the Lab. The Chessie coat is very oily and double thick, no water can penetrate a good Chessie coat, which allows him to spend more time in icy water than most other breeds. A Chessie needed to be camouflaged, this breed comes in colors ranging from light deadgrass to chocolate brown. A Chessie is one of the few breeds to have a yellow eye rather than a dark brown eye...yellow eyes impart a considerably meaner look to a dog, needed for effective guarding. The Chessie is higher in the rear, which makes for a stronger swimmer, and he has webbed feet.

Obviously, every breed has individuals that do not completely fit the mold, there are friendly Chessies and there are unfriendly Labs. In fact, as society changes so do breeds continue to evolve. Today an aggressive, over-protective dog can be a liability rather than an asset and Chessie breeders are making progress towards producing a more outgoing temperament in their dogs. But, not at the expense of other breed characteristics which make a Chesapeake a Chesapeake and not a Labrador.

In general, an educated puppy buyer should research breed type and history before selecting a breed that would best suit his needs. Don’t shop for a Keeshond if what you really want is a dog with the typical breed characteristics of fiesty Jack Russel Terrier or a working Rottweiler. If one wants a dog that is in every respect just like a Keeshond, then one should shop for a well-bred Keeshond.

Notice the word “well-bred” I did not say “pure bred”. Many uninformed people confuse the two, they are not one and the same. Pure bred means that supposedly both parents were of the same breed, it says nothing about both parents being of good breed type, one parent could be blind and the other severely dysplastic and their offspring would still be considered to be purebred if both parents were purebred. If I told you the disorder which caused the blindness and the displaysia both had heritability factors high enough to guarantee that at least one puppy in this purebred litter would be guaranteed to be blind and dysplastic by the age of three would you want it? Would you risk buying any of these puppies? “Well-bred” on the other hand, implies that not only is the puppy pure bred, but the parents of the puppy

descended from many generations of healthy, quality, typey stock and the likelihood of this puppy being equally as healthy throughout it's entire life is relatively high. Okay, which puppy are you going to buy?...HmMMMM.

If one wants a dog that is just like a Chesapeake, except it is friendly and outgoing, then shopping becomes more difficult, the buyer must specifically search for a breeder which has directed his/her breeding program towards improving the standard Chesapeake temperament. Can this be done through a pet shop? Judge for yourself, read on.

Let us now look at the sources mentioned and how these suppliers may or may not be able to help us with our purchase.

The Pet Shop: Most pet shop puppies come from puppy mills or so-called puppy brokers. Occasionally, a smaller pet shop may acquire puppies from a local backyard breeder. Most puppy mills are in business to make money by producing puppies as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Generally their breeding stock is inferior in quality to begin with and may be in poor health and fed inadequate diets as well. Such puppies will most certainly have inferior coats and a larger incidence of disorders affecting health, temperament, structural soundness, coat appearance and texture....in other words, few puppy mill puppies will exhibit good breed "type".

"Why is this?" you may ask. Well, before you started researching which breed of dog you wanted and before you knew what breed type meant, you probably had some breed of dog in mind you wanted. Maybe you had one when you were a kid, or the neighbors have one, or you saw one on TV or in a book and you liked it. Unfortunately, many puppy buyers never get beyond that point...saw it, liked it, bought one just like it...Hardly! Pet shops and hence, puppy mills prey on the uninformed, emotional shopper. This person wouldn't know breed type if it bit him on the nose.... sorry, I couldn't resist. If it is white and is covered with small spots it must be a Dalmation. They saw a Dalmation in the Disney movie, it was real cute, they want one. Now, here is this poor little puppy in a cage all lonely, he needs me...gotcha! This buyer forks over \$899 for this runt of a Dal puppy with a bad head, a toed-out front, a cow-hocked rear, roachy back, liver colored spots flecked with white hairs and watery eyes. One year later, this dog looks nothing like the one he saw on TV, is completely unsocialized, a problem barker and pees on everything in sight. On top of that this fine purebred puppy has epilepsy and Progressive Retinal Atrophy, a disorder resulting in progressive blindness for which there is no cure, and is going to be a very expensive dog to maintain.

Would you shop for a car that way? Or a Stereo? If you would, have I got a deal for you...People who can't be bothered to at least learn a little something about the breed they are considering, who then buy a pet shop puppy, and who then continue to be ignorant by not bothering to learn something about the dog they now have, get exactly what they deserve...a lemon. Only, there are no lemon laws when it comes to purchasing a pet....caveat emptor....let the buyer beware!

Besides ignorant people, who else buys pet shop puppies? Well, Suzie Do-good. she knows it's not a quality puppy, but she can't resist bailing the poor thing out, after all if she doesn't, who will? Well, for every puppy Suzie buys she is probably condemning three more to pet shops. How's that you say? Well, supply and demand...She buys the last Pug in the shop, so, the pet shop calls the puppy mill, that last Pug went so fast, gotta have another. So puppy mill breeds another litter...sends one to the pet shop in need, but, to get that one puppy for that one pet shop, there were also two littermates produced that will also have to go. It's sad, but the only way puppy mills will ever be put out of business is if we can educate the consumer to the realities of puppy mills and convince them to make a statement...boycott pet shop puppies. No more demand equals no more supply.

In some states laws have been passed to require pet shops to display the source from which the puppy was acquired, check it out. How many signs on cages have suppliers in the midwest? Kansas? Missouri? Iowa?

Do any of them specifically claim to produce a single breed like for instance Midwest Pug Kennels? Or, do you find several different breeds of puppies all coming from the same supplier? Don't you find that amazing that any one kennel can be an expert on breed type for so many different breeds? Get real! These suppliers don't care how typey or well-bred their puppies are, they aren't out to spend hours researching to acquire quality breeding stock for their operation. All they care about is meeting the demand. Need a Boxer...got a Boxer stud, need a bitch, go to the local shelter, find a Boxer bitch...looks like a Boxer, sort of...bail her out, take her home and breed her. If she produces keep her producing, if she doesn't, kill her and go get a new one. But, you don't believe me? This pet shop puppy has papers...how can it have papers and it's parents come from the pound? Trust me, papers aren't hard to come by. A pedigree is little more than a piece of paper listing a particular dog's ancestors. Whether or not the data presented on that piece of paper is accurate depends solely on the person supplying the data to the AKC. The accuracy of the data on that piece of paper is directly proportional to the reputability of the breeder from whence that paper came. You decide. The AKC does not have the resources necessary to check out every puppy miller in the country and verify their records. So if a puppy miller acquires a Boxer with papers and that Boxer doesn't produce, get rid of that one but keep the papers. Find a dog that looks like a Boxer that may or may not actually be a purebred Boxer but produces, apply the retained papers to the new dog and guess what...you have a purebred litter of puppies.....NOT! But who's going to know the difference. The only way the AKC could prevent this kind of thing from happening would be to inspect every kennel in the country frequently, inspect the kennel's records and compare each record to every dog on the premises, and require every dog to have some permanent form of identification such as a tattoo, microchip or DNA testing. While the AKC is taking steps in that direction, it's not going to happen in my lifetime.

So, let's review what has been said so far. Pet shop puppies come from puppy mills. Puppy mills obtain breeding stock of unknown ancestry and of questionable breed type to produce puppies of unknown ancestry and questionable breed type. Three years from now, when my pet shop purchase comes down with some strange disorder I will not be able to contact the breeder to obtain advice regarding previous experience with the same disorder. And, for all this, I can pay more money than if I bought from a reputable breeder a well-bred puppy. HMMMMM. I think I'll pass up that opportunity. No thank you!

Backyard Breeders: Most backyard breeders, although well-intentioned, just don't have enough knowledge of the lines they are working with, usually they have a "pet-quality" (never intended for breeding by the breeder) dog which they bred to another pet-quality dog and having little or no experience with the history behind the parents, have no knowledge as to whether the parents were suited to each other. As a result, 19 times out of 20, the puppies end up being of even poorer quality than either of the parents.

Now, if the backyard breeder's bitch, or the neighbor's stud dog came from a pet shop, then the puppy you are getting is no better, and could even be worse than one you get at a pet shop, only maybe cheaper. You get what you pay for. If you cannot afford the cost of a truly well-bred puppy, you cannot afford a dog, period. The initial cost of purchasing any puppy is the cheapest part of owning a dog. A well-bred puppy will have a higher probability of costing you less to maintain over its lifetime than a poorly bred puppy. One trip to the vet can more than offset any savings realized in buying a poorly bred puppy from a backyard breeder. Do you gamble? Do you like to take risks? If a backyard breeder presents you with a \$150 AKC registered puppy and all the other breeders you talked to wanted \$500-\$600, what are you risking? "All I want is a pet" you say, "I don't need some fancy show puppy from Champion parents". Well, educate yourself, a show dog is a well-socialized, healthy, typey example of the breed. Do you think that most good looking, polite, well-rounded, intelligent, clean-cut, respectful, high achieving children come from nasty-tempered, ugly, abusive, dirty, poorly educated, ill-bred, dim-witted parents? Go to a few dog shows, learn to recognize your chosen breed's type. Ask questions, study, learn what makes for a quality dog in your breed, then go back and take another look at the parents of that puppy. If you still feel good about it then go for it. If, on the other hand, after learning more about what makes for a sound pet both physically and emotionally, you don't like what you see in the parents, don't buy the puppy.

At a minimum, your breeder's animals should be in good condition, of good weight and exhibit good temperaments. The breeder's puppies should look healthy, be outgoing, be in good weight, and the kennel conditions should be clean. The puppies eyes should be clear and noses not runny. There should not be flies and three-day-old dog poop everywhere. The puppies should have access to fresh food and water. The puppies should have healthy coats and skin, not scratching excessively, They shouldn't have bare spots or dull coats.

Do visit a couple of reputable breeders first, even if you don't plan on buying from them. Ask the experienced breeder questions, observe their puppies, observe their kennel conditions. Find out what the parents have been checked for in the way of genetic disorders, ask the breeder why he/she bred the litter. Touch and play with the puppies and the parents. Ask more questions, ask to see the pedigree, ask about what the grandparents looked like. Ask what problems are most prevalent in the breed and what the main focus is in their breeding program. Ask them to point out what they see as the major faults in the puppies' parents, and the puppies themselves. An experienced, reputable breeder is honest. They know that there is no such thing as the perfect dog. They may not tell you all their deepest, darkest breeding disasters, but they shouldn't have a problem admitting that one of the puppies parents has a lower tail set than they would like to see or is cow-hocked or has a less than wonderful front.

Now go back to your backyard breeder and do the same, if after all that, you still feel good about it, then buy that puppy, chances are this backyard breeder is sincere and just starting out. Even the most experienced breeders had to start somewhere. But, if instead you feel uncomfortable, if you feel like the sole purpose of the litter was to make money, if you feel that this breeder has not even tried to educate his/her self to the same level that you have, then walk away. Do not support the insincere, uneducated, backyard breeder. They can be just as big a contributor to pet overpopulation and pound puppies as the puppy miller.

The Reputable Breeder: A serious breeder on the other hand, has been in the breed for some time, only uses the best quality animals, competes with those animals and thereby achieves a reputation to uphold. This breeder has a genuine interest in producing only the best possible puppies, because the purpose of the litter is to pick the next good show or obedience prospect. This breeder is familiar with the history behind their breeding stock.

Presumably, the more years of experience a breeder has, the better the quality of the breeder's line. Experience counts for a lot, you cannot learn anything about a particular line's shortcomings by reading a book. Congenital defects, genetically inherited disorders, breeding failures, etc. are not something most breeders openly share with other breeders or the general public. Experience has its price, you will generally pay more for experience although this is not always the case. Surprisingly enough, pet shops actually charge upwards of \$100 more for an inferior puppy from a puppy mill/broker than a breeder who has bred quality puppies for more than 25 years...why? Easy, overhead and middlemen, they are in it to make money. Backyard breeders are usually, but not always less expensive than reputable, experienced breeders, but then, shouldn't they be? After all, they haven't invested near as much time and expense to produce those puppies. It costs a lot of money to compete with your dog. It also costs a lot in time, you have to study and learn a lot before you can really be competitive.

Experienced, reputable breeders produce a litter for an entirely different reason than that of making money. These are people who are competitively involved. Even though they may have the facilities and the stock necessary to produce large quantities of puppies, that is not their interest. Competitive people like to win, winning is everything. The ultimate win in the ring is winning with a dog that you bred, you own and you personally trained and handled. To do this, a winning breeder learns all he/she can about the breed, acquires the best breeding stock possible, knowing that the chances of producing an outstanding animal increase in direct proportion to the quality of the parents used to produce that animal. Your chances of winning are increased if you use the best to get the best. While it may sound strange, a good breeder breeds a litter for very selfish reasons, they are looking for their next winner. They breed the best

to the best, looking for that rare, once-in-a-lifetime puppy. The rest of the litter will be sold, maybe to show homes if the puppy is deemed to be “show-quality”, to a pet home if not. Many show-quality puppies go to pet homes as this breeder is not necessarily as concerned that a show quality puppy go to a show home as they are that the puppy is loved and cared for. If a show home is not available then a top-rated pet home is the next best choice for that puppy. They produce the entire litter for the one special puppy they want. They only produce a litter when they have room in their own kennel for a new puppy. Selfish or not, ultimately these breeders are the ones that make the largest contribution to the overall quality and betterment of their breed.

Because one of these puppies is destined for the ring, the mother receives the best of care throughout her pregnancy. The puppies are socialized extensively early on, introduced to different surfaces, different sounds, and different touches. They are groomed and their toenails are clipped regularly. They are fat and have good coats and bright personalities. A show dog must have a very stable, outgoing temperament. It must be willing to allow a complete stranger to walk up, look at its teeth and run his hands over the dog’s entire body. It must submit to this trustingly and quietly. It must be able to tolerate strange places and loud noises. Not only tolerate, this dog must actually be able to come in to the ring with a “watch me, I’m great” attitude. Retired show dogs often make some of the very best family pets you could ever want. If you are looking to acquire an older dog rather than a puppy, seriously consider a retired show dog.

Reputable breeders generally have repeat business. Satisfied clients come back again and again. They have clients with more than one dog from them. They have clients on waiting lists to adopt retired show and breeding stock because those dogs are so special. They have clients that board or have their pets groomed there exclusively because they trust that breeder. They have clients who have become close friends. These breeders have been there and will continue to be there throughout the life of the pets they place. Their experienced advice has saved many a client more than a few dollars in vet bills over the years.

Reputable breeders who have been in the breed a long time and who produce relatively few litters also rarely need to advertise, word of mouth sells litters long before they are whelped. If you can get all this, for the same price or less than a pet shop, or a few dollars more than some backyard breeder trying to make a buck, why would you want to go anywhere else?

The Animal Shelter: I saved this for last, because it is a unique source. There are good reasons and poor reasons for getting a dog from the shelter. Whether the reason is a good one or a poor one depends on the education level of the individual doing the picking. A well educated person gets a dog from the shelter for all good reasons, while a poorly educated, ignorant individual selects a pound puppy for all the wrong reasons.

The educated individual knows that the animal being adopted is of questionable type and quality. He/she knows the animal’s temperament could be bad, that the animal may have health problems and become very expensive to maintain. But knowing all this allows him/her to make an educated choice. The pet is selected with care and the individual is well aware of his/her limitations. As a result, this adoptee will probably have the best chance possible for a good, permanent home. These are truly kind-hearted people.

The ignorant person on the other hand is stupid and selfish. Under the misguided notion that he/she can save a dog from certain death and they can get a “cheap” purebred in the process, they make poor choices. They are not aware of the risks involved nor are they aware of their own limitations. They mistakenly believe they are capable of getting a quality, purebred pet with good type and temperament. They take the pet home and when they find out they are way out of their league the pet ends up neglected, resented, pawned off on someone else, put down, or sent back to the shelter. These people never make good, responsible pet owners.

Conclusion: Be a good, responsible pet owner - educate yourself before you get your pet and then continue to educate yourself throughout your pet's life. The smartest people in the world are not the people who know it all ... the smartest people are the ones that never stop learning.