

Picking a Pup and Stacking the Odds

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So very often we see or hear gun dog owners who have to compromise with a dog they have purchased that didn't live up to their expectations. This could be a pup that doesn't have a compatible temperament with the new owner. Issues such as bull-headedness, aggressiveness or, to the other extreme, too passive or soft making them too difficult to train. Health issues also suddenly arise that could have been avoided for the most part, unless you do your homework. By the time they become reality you and your family have become too attached to the dog to ever consider exchanging to resolve the problem.

When considering obtaining a new addition to your family as a hunting partner, there are several objectives that will eliminate future problems.

The most common method to picking a pup is to request a certain color, sex and then pick the first pup of that description that jumps up to them. All you know is the color, sex and that it is a cute pup. Chances are you will have to adjust your expectations to conform to your liking in the future.

Prior to selecting a pup, consider what do you really want as a top gun dog. A range of topics such as temperament, confirmation, pedigree quality, health certification, and will we ever consider having a litter. Do I want a better dog than what I already own? Would I ever like to own a master quality dog and explore AKC or NAVHDA testing?

Make it a point to request to view both parents if at all possible. You will be looking at their temperament, conformation, and hunting history. Learn how to read the pedigree and registration paperwork. They will not only tell you the history but, what to expect in the future. When observing the parent's pedigrees look for notable "hall of fame" caliber ancestors. Do the parents and grandparents have symbols such as CH, FC, SH and MH. These abbreviations signify outstanding accomplishment not easily acquired. It is desirable to want a blend of conformation and hunting achievements. This gives you good hunting stock as well as good conformation. A word of caution here, if the parents are of field trial stock, often times these develop into dogs that have too high of an energy level for a decent house dog.

Also take notice that under each individual's name is a series of small print. The hip rating of dogs that were tested will give you an indication if potential hip dysplasia will be a problem. For the most part, when the parents have been tested it is insurance that your puppy will not have this disease. If the parents

were not tested, and you don't see many ancestors test scores, this is a red flag for potential problems down the road.

Ask to see health certificates on the parents' eyes, called a CERF Test, which means the parents, have been tested for pre-retina degeneration. Like bad hips, some breeds and bloodlines are more prone to genetic defects than others. Have the parents had their heart tested? Ask if there is an OFA heart certificate to ward against heart murmur, leaky valve, etc. which could be hereditary problem. Many of these questions can be covered by phone, prior to ever viewing a litter. It doesn't take any more money to raise a great pup than it does an undesirable one. But, telling your children that we cannot afford to have Fido's hips repaired, or cannot hunt with him at an early age is an unnecessary and difficult decision to make.

So, now you have selected a litter to look at and here are our objectives. We want to end up with the best bragging gun dog you have ever owned. It is important to request to see the pups one hour prior to eating. This way, their eagerness level will be most active. Color and sex will always play a large part in the selection process, but it shouldn't. The pups that isolate themselves and hide off to the side as well as the runt if there is one are first eliminated, and not considered for purchasing. Passive shy pups are often the soft dogs meaning, difficult to train and shutdown easily. The runts are cute and grab on our hearts but usually tend to be small and under sized in regards to the American Kennel Club (AKC) standards.

Watch the puppies trot along the floor. Look for pups with good bone density and a long stride. The head is very important and can tell you a lot. The eyes should be wide apart and big. Small-eyed dogs seem to turn out to be more bull-headed and have an attitude.

Observing the pup's muzzle will help you in selecting a soft mouth dog, one that gently carries a bird without mauling it. You want a dog with long mouth and wide muzzle. Shorter mouthed dogs have difficulty carrying large birds such as ducks and pheasants, and will have to use a harder grip to carry the bird.

Tail placement is important if you want an upright tail for there is certain elegance when a tail is carried upward vs. a downward angle.

Say you are down to three pups and we want to see and test their temperament. How hard are they going to be to train or won't they take any pressure and be a soft dog? There are several ways to handle the pups and readily tell their extremes. Roll each pup on its back, placing a hand on its belly and roll and rub it a bit. Continue holding it there for a few seconds. You are testing it for temper and tolerance. If it growls at you, bites and draws blood,

obviously this is going to be one tough hombre to train. The other extreme is if it cries almost immediately signifying softness.

Also pinching one of the forefeet with your thumb for 10 seconds, and gradually increasing pressure on the web, to test for sensitivity. If the pup defies you, looks you straight in the eye and doesn't say a word, this gives you an indication of its thick headedness. Of course if the pup shows discomfort and cries instantly, this will indicate a soft sensitive dog that if trained will not care for uncomfortable situations. This means a hunting dog that will not desire hunting in cold, briars, thickets, etc.

When feeding time has arrived watch the couple you have narrowed it down to. We are now looking for attitude, and aggressive behavior. This will give you a good indication of how well this pup will get along with dogs in the hunting field and with your other dogs at home.

Yes, a litter is truly like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get. But, there is certainly no reason not to eliminate the extremes, get a pup with some sort of health guarantee and a substantial pedigree. Definitely you can stack the odds of obtaining a dream dog in your favor, with no compromising.