

## Acquiring a Puppy

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The acquisition of a puppy must be predicated by a unanimous family decision and that decision must be predicated by the acquisition also of a certain amount of knowledge of what that will entail and really mean for the family for the foreseeable future. It is not a decision to take lightly. There is no specific science to the process but a healthy dose of plain old- fashioned common sense should prevail. One should not neglect considering the option of giving a dog a “second chance”. Rescue centres work tirelessly to ensure the best possible outcome for dogs which often through no fault of their own have been displaced. If you have a specific breed in mind, then the absolute basics before approaching a breeder are ensuring that one can guarantee kennelling & time which will accommodate the specific needs of the chosen breed. The bare minimum requirement as a prospective purchaser is that one visits with the breeder, has full knowledge of where and how that puppy was raised, has seen the puppy’s mother in the flesh and has engaged with a breeder who will volunteer help and advice and be available going forward to continue to support you. As a purchaser be prepared to not only question the breeder but expect to field questions from the breeder in your direction as they seek to establish

your suitability. Registration certificates, transfer of ownership documents, microchip details, diet sheets, grooming advice, vaccination & parasite control information and regardless of whether one has an interest in showing the dog, a five-generation pedigree, all of these are bare minimum expectations.

Some “show kennels” may not confine their interests to a single breed, some breeders may not choose to exhibit their dogs, this does not determine a negative credential, but buyer beware, take heed of all of the freely available advice and above all else avoid the “Puppy Farmer”. Whether or not your puppy is for showing do also consider membership of a breed club, an additional layer of support or information platform could be valuable.

As an attempt to protect the integrity of their kennel; a breeder may legitimately impose an endorsement upon the registration and request that you not yourself breed with that animal in the future. This need not be of concern, except of course if your preference is to leave open that window of opportunity for the future. Many established exhibitors/breeders began their own journey in the dog world more by accident rather than design. There is a balance to be struck between the ring fencing of one’s breeding and the permission for “new blood” to find their way naturally into the fold and become perhaps tomorrows successful kennel owner.

A breeder may quite legitimately steer the purchaser in the direction of a certain puppy. Minor variations may separate in their eyes that which has potential for the show ring but the same care and attention, and of course the same background applies to all the litter mates. Finding your choice to be restricted within a litter should therefore not be any cause for alarm. The breeder will attempt to match as best they can each puppy with the most appropriate home.

Should you wish to pursue an interest in exhibition, seek to familiarise yourself with all specifics of your chosen breed. Make use of the ample reading material that is available but if possible, see as much in the flesh as you possibly can and speak with a broad range of exhibitors. Albeit, held within an eight-week-old frame, a page only of a full story which is yet to unfold, the basics of the standard from head, eye and expression through to conformation of the dog will all be there to evaluate. The precise prediction of how that eight-week-old puppy might develop and mature will be a combination of experience, educated presumptions based upon that experience and a healthy dose of common luck. Not every puppy will make every standard we set for it. Yes, you will want to work with the best, but you will need to possess also a modicum of patience, have a vision of something you wish to work towards rather than assume a right to instant success. In dogs we are not dealing with an inanimate object, we have all the joys and all the complexities of a life lived with a gift of nature to look forward to and to be challenged by.

### “SEE” THE PEDIGREE



Whether you are a novice, relative novice or even one with experience under your belt, always keep an open mind and be prepared to learn. No self- elected doyenne of the breed, but the real deal, was one Mrs. Audrey Chatfield of the Dunsinane Rough Collies. A hugely successful breeder, exhibitor and judge, the late Mrs. Chatfield was responsible in 1980, for the introduction of the International Collie Handbook, an annual then eagerly awaited by Collie enthusiasts the world over before the advent of the web site and social media. Those early handbooks contained amongst the many kennel adverts, not something new or revolutionary, but a very simple but effective reference number assigned to each breeder page/address. This inclusion of a UK map grid reference is rather telling as it points to what was in those years a common practice – the practice of the kennel visit. There is much to be gained and learned from visiting shows even without your own dogs in tow and simply taking the time to observe and engage with fellow exhibitor and their stock whilst not in competition with them. There will surely be dogs who in that setting will make an impression upon you and which will leave a lasting memory. However there is something to be said for taking the time as so many did in the ‘80’s to visit a kennel, to see not only the current ring bound stock but to experience the kennels breeding, from veterans to retired, to puppies and to have the time to speak with breeders at a more leisurely pace. There is something about the way in which you will eventually recall these dogs which is just a little different.



There are dogs which I see in my minds eye as if it were yesterday and I need to pinch myself to remember it was possibly 30 to 40 years ago in reality. There are dogs of whom I know exactly what was under that ring ready coat, or exactly how they moved because I groomed the same dogs with their owners or took them for exercise and so on. The point is that in choosing this option and in visiting also not alone, the best-known dog shows but a broad range of same; it is possible to build that “picture pedigree” in your mind. The pedigree beyond a certain time frame is not document of mere words and names, it

is a living thing, its representatives as you go along become as much a part of your memory and knowledge as anything else so in choosing a new puppy, choose also to “see” the pedigree.

### **The Import**

The practice then of the kennel visit remains of course but I suspect now in a more limited way, and this is partially influenced by the landscape of the Collie world which has also altered in the intervening years. The world is a smaller place and seems to revolve at a faster pace or, perhaps it is simply that some of us are just getting older! Where once the UK rings were filled with almost universally British bred stock, where once the leading exporter of the Collie might have been the UK, the last number of decades have witnessed a shift from that geographically based tradition. The UK retains its status, its standards in quality and maintains a broad base of long standing, experienced breeders but its rings present now a more international flavour. The arrival of the pet passport signalled a sea change which many have chosen to take advantage of. If one identifies a kennel overseas which might provide useful breeding/ show stock then if the distance is no longer prohibitive, if the cost is not exclusive; and if a logical, thoughtful, knowledgeable and purposeful process has taken place then there is no reason whatsoever not to consider broadening one’s horizons and elect to purchase a puppy from beyond one’s own or neighbouring country.

The world is in truth your oyster and you are at liberty without fear of negative commentary to explore all option open to you. However, some words of caution on this subject. On some occasions, there can be a contradiction. If, within our own country the common practice would be as breeder to “Vet” prospective puppy purchasers, if within our own country it would be commonplace as a purchaser to visit the breeding establishment from which you intend to procure that same puppy then it is surely incumbent upon one when importing, to at the very least inform

oneself of where that puppy is coming from. If unable to visit in person or select in person, the principles of engagement are surely still applicable are they not, they are not for suddenly dispensing with and so a modicum of “homework” would seem appropriate. If one specifically seeks out something which offers genetic diversity , if one seeks to maintain a certain lineage by “re importing” that , if one seeks to import lineage which is intrinsically the same as one’s own motherland but “blended” in an alternative way and thus of value then all of these options are legitimate and can bear fruit. If on the other hand the purchase is an impulse one or becomes an habitual impulse and leads in turn to the evolution of a revolving kennel door policy; one in, one out; a kennel where nothing ever grows old, than the wisdom of such is legitimately questionable and commentary can be legitimately expected. The impulse internet purchase of an item of clothing has little implication for the item can usually be easily returned. The dog however which is not the “correct fit” on arrival or which no longer satisfies its owners need for that new “young hopeful fix”, is not as readily “repackaged”. There is a major difference between having occasion to “run” something on and then part with something which did not fulfil its promise v’s habitually “moving” something on.

### **THE GUARANTEE**

The responsible breeder will conduct their affairs in keeping with their Kennel Club code of conduct and it would be appropriate to refer to the Irish Kennel Club website for details and for further helpful advice also. The breeder will have also over time developed their own personal code of practice. One breeder will for example make themselves available to offer help and advice over the full lifetime of that puppy, another may undertake to have the puppy returned to the home kennel at any point during its lifetime should the need present. Another may undertake to refund the purchaser in the event of a return for either a fixed or extended period. In all cases the responsible breeder is maintaining interest in and for an animal which without their direction, would of course ,not otherwise have existed, however that said, no breeder comes to the table blessed with a crystal ball in terms of future circumstances and therefore in respect of “return” or “refund” should surely, fairly retain some right of self -protection also. From the purchasers’ point of view, the expectation is that the breeder has done everything in their power to ensure the best possibly start in life for the puppy. As a purchaser however do bear in mind also that if you acquire a puppy at 8 weeks of age (and one ought not acquire one before that age) then by the time that puppy is a mere 24 week of age, it has already been in the procession of the purchaser for twice the length of time it spent with its breeder. If those first few weeks of a puppy’s life are critically important, remember the following few months bear not alone the pleasure of raising a dog, but the window of opportunity to undo some or all of the good work executed by the breeder, both parties then have a responsibility.

With luck your puppy will go on to live a long, carefree, happy, healthy life; with all its caregivers having contributed to that goal. The dog will return that commitment tenfold!! The dog however is not an accessory, however well cared for, no more, no less, it is subject to many of the same health issues as may occur in any of us. In other words, there are guarantees which one can expect and then there are, realistically, expectations, which cannot be guaranteed. Such is life.

### **Puppy Farming**

Much time and attention has been given over to the so-called “Puppy Farmer”, the highly questionable and unfortunate industry generated by individuals who seek to create profit from misery. Much attention has also been focussed upon the mediums through which such individuals advertise their “product”, it is worth remembering that online adverts are a current day replacement for what was once the newspaper classifieds, neither the current, the modern day version nor the old classifieds are/were “policed”, but labelling a breeder by the method through which they might advertise is something of a distraction, it is not helpful perhaps, the medium is not the cause, not the root of the problem. It might be better controlled and the path to puppy purchase might be far better served by a path walked to the Kennel Club or a Breed Club but over emphasis upon advertising mediums at the expense of getting to the root of the problem is of questionable productivity. In noble attempts to stamp out the practice of mass production of multiple breeds, an unfortunate by product has emerged. Where legislation exists to prohibit or curtail the methods and movements of the “Puppy Farmer”; there has developed a domino effect one which has had a negative effect also upon the legitimate and completely responsible breeder.

Whilst the need for legislation exists, whilst every possible and conceivable deterrent against puppy farming should be considered; it is nevertheless regrettable, when we adopt a mindset of continuous “firefighting”, of endlessly trying to create a “fix” for a problem too late in the game. In focusing upon legislation to tackle the methods of the unscrupulous we are sometimes given to forgetting that by definition, the unscrupulous will inevitably find a way out of or around a situation, leaving instead the beleaguered responsible breeder to pay the price as they attempt to navigate sometime almost quite literally choppy waters such as when innocently crossing the Irish Sea for a long planned mating, or for a dog show. Yes, the puppy farmer is a problem, a major one – but - he is not – THE problem, and the longer we continue to “fire fight” the more we prolong the issue. To envisage a “puppy farmer” is not a challenge, we can conger up an image, mentally attach a personality, vilify that image. But that is not productive. The challenge truly lies in that which is least comfortable for us to face up to. The challenge is that the puppy farmer exists only because of, only for as long as, a demand for his product exists. Remove the demand and one removes the product. The Challenge lies in the uncomfortable fact that whilst the puppy farmer might be some remote, removed image for us – the

product on the other hand, i.e. the puppy and into whose hands the product is given - the purchaser – they could be our relative, our friend, our neighbour, they are potentially “every man” .

The problem is that the “everyman”, cannot lay claim to perpetual innocence, the problem is that we know now for too many years that any involvement with the unscrupulous breeder is unwise and yet as a society we repeatedly fall foul to this. What needs to occur is a conscious cultural shift and that must start with our children. We have seen the efforts made with appreciation of the pre and junior school visits of dog charity officials. This type of engagement and early childhood learning is certainly beneficial. The limitations of its effect however lie in the fact we forget that unlike us adults, a year for example in the life of a child is quite a long time, the absence therefore of a lesson repeated can negate the value of a lesson only once taught.

The mixed messages of government agencies ,all at once suggesting that individuals might in poorly performing farming sectors, consider diversification into the breeding of the dog for profit (and yes this has occurred !) whilst another agency attempts to control that practice, the financing of that conflict, the policing of that legislation, is it sometimes at the expense of funding which might be otherwise positively be re-directed into an ongoing programme, education , an education which in time will naturally produce the desired cultural shift so that the children of today, as they become tomorrow’s dog owners, not only know what is right and wrong in terms of acquiring a dog but actually see it through, act accordingly and stop turning a blind eye.

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