



*Understand what
really goes into
responsible breeding*



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BREEDING



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Responsible BREEDING

Not as easy as it looks

When most people are asked about their very first love; they probably recall someone from high school. Not me. My very first love was a Golden Retriever named 'George!' at the age of three.

From that time on I have always wanted to own a Golden Retriever and my dream was finally realised at the age of 24, but I didn't always have the desire to breed Golden Retrievers. It wasn't until I started showing and got involved in training and the dog world that I began to contemplate breeding.

After being in the breed for 19 years I repeatedly get asked what makes a good Breeder and should I breed my dog. And being a responsible breeder what do you say to the puppy buyer who says I don't want a show dog, I just want a pet.

This is probably one of the first things that lots of puppy buyers, especially families, say when they're looking for a dog. What they really mean, of course, is that they don't want to pay a high price they think so called "show breeders" charge for a dog that they are never going to show, they don't want to go through the often-invasive interview process, and think that they're getting a better deal or a real bargain because they can get a "Golden Retriever" cheaper from someone who just bred their pet golden retriever.

For the first part of this article I want to convince you that the only Golden Retriever you should buy is a "show-bred" one. And for the second part I want to give you some insight of what is involved in being a responsible breeder if you are contemplating breeding.

I want you to not only realize the benefits of buying a dog from a responsible breeder ("show-bred") dog, I want you to INSIST on a show-bred dog. And I want you to realise that the cheap dog is really the one that's the rip-off. And then I want you to be obnoxious and when your friend says she's getting a puppy because her neighbour, who raises them, will give her one for free, or when your brother-in-law announces that they're buying a goldendoodle for the kids, I want you to stop them, steal their wallets. This is what causes an average of 50,000 dogs being turned over to the RSPCA every year and of these around 10,000 are being euthanised. The suffering and sorrow associated with pet overpopulation is overwhelming. And yet, much of it could be eliminated by breeding only for the right reasons.

Why a "show-bred dog"

If I ask you why you want a Golden Retriever, I would bet you're not going to only talk about how much you like their colour. You're going to tell me things about personality,

ability (to perform a specific task), relationships with other animals or humans, size, coat, temperament, and so on. You'll describe you want an active dog to suit your outdoor lifestyle, or how affectionate you've heard that they are, or how well they get along with children.

The things you will be looking for aren't the things that describe just a "dog"; they'll be the things that describe the Golden Retriever and make it unique from other breeds.

That's where potential puppy buyers have made the right initial decision – they've taken the time and made the effort to understand that there are differences between breeds and that they should get one that at least comes close to matching their picture of what they want a dog to be.

Their next step, unfortunately, is that they go out and find a dog of that breed for as little money, with as much ease as possible and that they don't have to wait for.

You need to realize that when you do this, you are selling yourself short and damaging the welfare of the breed. It's like going to the used car dealership, WATCHING them pry the "Porsche" plate off a new Porsche, and sticking it on a '97 Corolla, and then writing them a check and feeling smug that you got a Porsche for so little. It is no bargain.

Those things that distinguish the Golden Retriever from just any other "dog" are only there because somebody worked really hard to get them there. And as soon as that work stops, the dog, no matter how purebred, begins to revert to the generic. That doesn't mean you won't get a good dog – the magic and the beauty of dogs is that they are so hard to mess up, in their good souls and minds, that even the most hideously bred one can still be a great dog – but it will not be a good Golden Retriever. You will not get the specialised abilities, nature, or talents of the Golden Retriever.

If you don't NEED those special abilities or the predictability of a particular breed, you should not be buying a dog at all. You should rescue one. That way you're saving

a life and not financing irresponsible breeding practices.

If you want a purebred and you know that a rescue is not going to fit the bill, the absolute WORST thing you can do is assume that just having the name pure bred Golden Retriever in the advert is everything. Keeping a group of dogs looking and acting like their breed is extremely, HARD work. If you do not get the impression that the breeder you're considering is working that hard, is that dedicated to the breed, is struggling to produce dogs that are more than a breed name, you are getting no bargain; you are only getting ripped off.

Do not finance irresponsible breeding practices

Responsible BREEDING

What you should consider if you are contemplating breeding.

Interview with DR CARLA O'DONNELL PHD, CPDT

What led you to become a breeder?

C: I bought my first golden retriever at 24 and fell more in love with the breed and being the nerd that I am started to research the breed and what was involved in responsible dog ownership. Being a good owner I took my puppy to puppy school and got a real interest in training and training techniques. Unfortunately we lost our first golden tragically at the age of three but she introduced me to the dog world. Looking back now my first golden wasn't what I would judge as show quality. But hey, everybody has to start somewhere. As I learned more and started to attend dog shows I came to understand the diversity within the breed. I felt I had the passion and was willing to put in the hard work needed to preserve the welfare and characteristics of our breed. So I set out to find a breeder who was breeding the bloodlines that would produce a foundation bitch with the qualities I desire in a Golden Retriever.

How easy was that?

C: It took a few years until a litter was born that had a suitable puppy, which shows that breeding is not easy and takes dedication, patience and a lot of hard work. Even with patience and hard work no one has bred a Golden Retriever that is perfect in respect to conformation and all the other breed characteristics.

How do you choose what dogs should be bred and with whom?

C: Firstly we have to remember that the animals we select for breeding today will have an impact on the breed for many years to come. My motto is the medics principle "primum non nocere" -- "above all, do no harm!" As responsible breeders we have to resolve ourselves to the fact that we will probably never breed the perfect Golden, but we don't stop trying and always try to get the best we can. Keeping in mind that quality is a combination of soundness and function, my first goal as a breeder is to produce sound Goldens. This is important to me and with a breed that has one of the highest numbers of genetic mutations a lot of research needs to go in to selecting breeding pairs. Not only are we looking for a breeding partner that compensates for the weakness that we can actually see in our dogs, we also need to understand the pedigrees of our dogs and now what traits that we can't see in our mating pair but which they still might pass on to their puppies. We need to know which blood lines are known for particular traits. These traits can be both good and bad.

We have to be mindful of maintaining the balance of numbers of sires and dams in pedigrees we don't want to use fewer individual sires than dams. We should be much more rigorous when selecting which males to breed for a pretty obvious reason: whereas a bitch can only produce so many puppies in her lifetime, a male dog could father

dozens nearly every day of his life. Our choice of mother is very important, hereditary traits are inherited equally from both parents. However, the mother will have more influence in the puppies' behaviour than the father because she spends more time with them. We need to understand the Coefficient of Inbreeding (COI) and monitor this in our breeding, preferably over ten generations of the pedigrees we want to use, with a view to keeping it as low as possible. Just because we have an intact dog we shouldn't just breed from them, do the research and sometimes the hard decision must be made not to include them in the breeding programme, just enjoy them for their individual beauty. Being a breeder is a big responsibility to our breed when we breed animals for special characteristics, physical as well as behavioural, we are playing with fire, changing the genome that natural selection created and tested throughout centuries.

Have you ever produced dogs with problems?

C: Yes even after doing the hard work and the research, problems do happen because that is nature. Breeding is heartbreaking at times and I'm sure most responsible breeders have felt that they have let the breed down and perhaps thought about stopping breeding. But I think it is this care and passion for the breed which makes a good breeder. Thankfully they don't stop breeding as they would do more harm by walking away than by continuing. Additionally, it made me come to realise the what the

definition of a "responsible breeder" is: a responsible breeder is not one that never produces a problem, but one that when a problem does occur they deal with it through warranty, concern and by providing guidance and support to the owner for the life of the puppy. Responsible breeders don't just breed puppies and look after them for 8 weeks and then forget about them. They provide support and education for the life of the puppies they produce and will always be concerned about the welfare of their pups, being prepared to take a pup back and finding it a new home if needed.

Why should you breed?

C: You love your dog dearly and think; wouldn't the world be a better place if there were more dogs just like her or him? However, before you breed your dog, take some time to consider whether or not it is the best thing to do and whether you are doing it for the right reasons. Make this decision carefully and only after a lot of research into the breed, join the state breed club, attend dog shows/sports and talk with experienced breeders.

A responsible breeder is not interested in breeding for the sake of selling puppies or because puppies are cute, or they would like the experience or because they believe it's good for their dog to have a litter. None of these are good reasons to have puppies. Pet overpopulation is a major concern. Raising a litter takes a lot of time, work and money and your

aim should always be to improve the breed. Responsible breeders breed with the intention of keeping a puppy to continue their bloodlines. Golden retrievers are golden retrievers because they have been bred through careful study, with breeders who have the patience to wait until the right breeding stock is available and not just breeding with what is convenient or close by, evaluating what they have already produced and above all, having a breeding plan that is at least three generations ahead of the breeding they are doing today.

How old and how often should you breed?

C: A dog must be over 12 months before they can get clear health certificates that are essential for the health of the breed. A dog must therefore be over one year before even considering breeding them and I think this is still too young. A large dog doesn't reach maturity both physically and mentally until they are around three years old and I like my girls to be around three for their first litter and I like to use males that are older than this. Any breeding candidate (plus his or her parents) should be healthy and free of any breed-specific medical conditions including cancer. Waiting to breed a dog until they reach maturity helps to ensure that we are breeding healthy adults – and that we selectively breed for longevity. Longevity is the best indicator of physical health as well as good behaviour and temperament. We want companion dogs to be friendly and to live long healthy lives, and we should selectively breed for those outcomes.

Having a litter of Puppies must be a lot of fun?

C: Yes, raising a litter is a very rewarding and a fun experience but it is also hard work, it takes a huge commitment of time and involves a lot of expense from the cost of doing all the health tests, the cost of the mating especially if it is by A.I or the dog had to fly across the country, which is often the case in Perth because of our isolation and the importance of maintaining a healthy diverse gene pool, to the cost of raising a healthy litter so that the puppies can reach their full potential to live a happy life as part of a family. A responsible breeder is lucky to break even on a litter of puppies. It is also very difficult to let them go to their new homes even after you have interviewed prospective buyers and found suitable homes for your puppies. A responsible breeder will be extremely choosy in selecting homes for their puppies and a prospective owner can begin to evaluate a breeder's expertise by noting whether she ranks the puppies' mental well-being and physical health above their good looks.

Not only does a lot of time and research go in to getting a litter of puppies, raising a litter is extremely time consuming. A responsible breeder will regularly meet with potential puppy buyers asking them questions and happily answer their questions. They will show you the pedigrees of the puppies and the health certificates of the parents. They will be happy to answer questions, for example whether the puppy's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and other relatives live to a ripe old age. One of the

best indicators of general health, good behaviour and temperament of your puppy is the overall life expectancy of the breeder's line. Long-lived dogs advertise good temperament, health and training. If the breeder is not eager to share or doesn't know information regarding life expectancy and the incidence of breed-specific diseases, look elsewhere.

A responsible breeder will give you plenty of time to meet and play with as many of your puppy's adult relatives as possible. Friendly dogs are self-apparent when you meet them. Friendly dogs are living proof of good socialisation by a good breeder. Beware of the breeder who won't let you meet the parents of the puppies. A responsible breeder will most likely only have the mum of the pups. It's possible that they were lucky enough to have a perfect stud and bitch, but it's highly unlikely. However, they should be happy for you to meet the mum. If the breeder hesitates at all, walk away. In fact a good breeder will take the time to see how you get along with adult dogs before letting you anywhere near their puppies. A good breeder wouldn't let you leave with a puppy if you didn't know how to handle an adult dog, which your puppy will be in a short amount of time. They will take the time to teach you how to handle and train adult dogs. A good breeder has well socialised, people friendly adult dogs that are well trained.

Responsible breeders know that the first few weeks of a puppy's life are extremely important and they have an excellent socialisation and training programme for their puppies that is very time consuming. They raise their puppies indoors where they can start toilet training them and exposing them to common loud household noises such as adults

shouting, babies crying, televisions, cooking pots banging, vacuum cleaners etc... They have started to teach their puppies basic obedience skills such as, to come, sit, lie down, and roll over. They have organised lots of different people to handle, play and train with their pups daily including children and men.

Final thoughts:

Before breeding your Golden, take the time to research, talk to experienced breeders and join your states breed club. Dogs from responsible breeders are more likely to grow up to be healthy good ambassadors of the breed.

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