



A Testimonial to Mt. View Brittanys



Picking a breeder is a relatively simple process—but picking a good breeder takes some work. First, you have to figure out what you want from your dog. Do you want a show dog, a hunter, a watchdog, a family pet? What size dog do you want? What personality? What sex? When you can answer all that, then look at what you can give a dog in return. Where do you live—in the city or country? Do you have a fenced in yard? How much free time do you have? Do you have special considerations like young children or elderly relatives living with you? All these factors are important because you have to know what you're looking for before you can possibly know where to find it.

In my case, I wanted a hunting dog (the one factor my husband insisted on) that would be a good family pet with our two children. I didn't really care a whole lot one way or the other about showing my dog, but tended against it because of the expense involved. However, I did want a dog that conformed to the breed standard and was attractive to look at. I also wanted a dog that was highly trainable, didn't shed too much, was easy to groom, and didn't have a tail that could clear a coffee table with one swish.

Armed with this knowledge, I went to the library. The first thing I brought home was an AKC video on sporting dogs. I wanted to see what was available within my range of requirements. Looking at the video, I found that I liked three breeds: the Weimeraner, the Visla, and the Brittany, in that order. I returned the video and borrowed lots of dog books. I wanted to learn as much as possible.

After reading everything that seemed pertinent to my search, I started talking with dog people. In meeting breeders and observing their dogs, I started applying my book learning to real life.

Our first visit was to a beautiful Weimeraner and her puppies. The litter was kept in a cardboard refrigerator box in the basement, a worrying concern since it meant that the puppies were totally isolated from normal household noises. But that wasn't the deciding factor. We ruled the litter out after seeing the bitch nip and growl at our daughter. We also got our first lesson on the importance of temperament.

A puppy inherits his temperament from three sources: genetically from his parents and grandparents, first-hand from his mother, and through the socialization and handling done by the breeder. If any one of these sources is unfit, then the odds are the puppy will pick up at least some of that problem.

So we looked more deeply into the breed's characteristics to see if it was really right for us. I met with the Weimeraner "rescue" person for our area and found her to be an excellent source of objective information. Since she dealt specifically with Weimeraners who, for one reason or another, had been abandoned by their owners, she knew first-hand their best and worst characteristics. She helped us realize that because Weimeraners are large, high-energy dogs, they are happiest where they have lots of room to run. We live in the city so we eliminated Weimeraners and added "mid-sized" to our evolving list of dog requirements.

That left the Visla and Brittany. Having a good friend who had just purchased a Visla; we started with his breeder. He recommended her as producing excellent dogs but warned us that she was a little "nuts" personally! She lived way out in the country with 15 dogs and no phone, so I could only contact her through her work. She wasn't planning another litter for a while but recommended a friend of hers. I called the friend and found her to be so odd on the phone that we chose not to even see her dogs (if you can't stand the breeder, you shouldn't get near her dog!). We felt so unsettled by this woman that we moved right along to Brittanys.

This time, I phoned the local AKC chapter for a list of reputable breeders. Going down the list, I visited the ones who had or were planning to have a litter with liver-colored dogs available within a year.

The first was a hunter who wanted to reproduce his favorite hunting dog for a few of his buddies. He and his wife were in their sixties and had a poodle for their house dog while his hunting dogs were kept in a make-shift kennel outside. However, because it was winter, he kept the whelping box in the basement. It was a nice, wooden box with a special heating lamp, but once again, the location was bad. The puppies never saw anyone except him, when he went down to supplement their feedings with kibble. They were 4 weeks old at the time and I knew, from all my reading, that they should have been receiving human socialization. Also, the dam had a big tick attached to her ear, which showed me that she wasn't getting the attention she needed either. We left in a hurry.

The next breeder's puppies were in the living room of her home, in a large x-pen. We saw them both with and without their mother and learned from the breeder that they were well socialized. They were alert, friendly, and playful, but, they weren't the color we wanted and so we moved on.

The last breeder we met was Mary Ann. We saved her for last because she was the farthest from our home. We talked for half an hour on the phone and everything she said fit in with what I had been reading. She said we could visit her any time we liked and also suggested we go to the next show she was entered in. Two weeks later we watched her win Best in Show, Best of Breed, Best in Sweepstakes, Winners Bitch, and Best of Winners at the New Jersey Brittany Club show! We talked with her when she wasn't in the ring and watched her interact with her dogs. The kids played with Diamond, one of the dogs she was showing, and loved everything about her. I said then that, even though I had my heart set on getting a liver-colored dog, if I could get an exact replica of Diamond, I'd go with orange in a second (she was that nice).

But we wanted liver and Diamond wasn't old enough to breed anyway. Mary Ann told us to visit some of her references, and if we liked what we saw, to drive up to her place. It wasn't long before we were in the car headed north on the two-hour drive to Mt. View Brittany's. We saw Princess (Diamond's mother and Mary Ann's only liver bitch), fell in love instantly, and put down a deposit for a liver bitch from her next litter. A year and a half later we brought Zoe home. And a year after that, we got Daisy, Diamond's first-born puppy (yes, she's orange but we've come to love the color).

So, when people ask me what makes a good breeder, I think about Mary Ann and the characteristics that make her so special. First of all, what is the quality of her dogs and her breeding program? Her dogs are bred to hunt and show, and are excellent at both, but if I had to describe them in just one word, it would be "temperament." When I first met Princess, I took out my camera and she pulled back her lips in a big, toothy grin. Surprised, I asked Mary Ann what she was doing and she replied, "smiling for the camera" (as if that's something all dogs do!). When her puppies were 3 days old I brought my children to see them and Princess not only welcomed them into the whelping box, she kissed them and wagged her tail.

The second thing is dedication. I honestly don't know how she does it except to say that, as much as anyone can, Mary Ann lives for her dogs. Everything is centered on them. And every element of her breeding program is focused on improving her line. She has top-quality stock, but that's not all there is to her success. It's the time, money, and effort that she puts into everything she does with her dogs that amazes me. If you're into ribbons and trophies, she's got rooms full of them. But I don't think that's her driving force. It's more likely her mix of perfectionism, professionalism, and love for the breed.

And the third thing is to follow through. Unlike most purchases today, buying a puppy is a long-term commitment. Mary Ann is there for the long haul, willing to board your dog if you go on vacation, offering training advice, handling classes, and even health care tips. If you choose to show or hunt your dog, she'll help you there too. She wants to see you succeed and she wants every puppy she places to reach its full potential.

As far as picking a breeder goes, if you can't get Mary Ann, then look for the following: a knowledgeable dog expert who cares deeply for her breed, breeds to improve her line, stands behind her dogs with written guarantees, doesn't over-breed, has healthy, top quality dogs, breeds for temperament, works constantly with the puppies, mentors and follows through with the new owners, and keeps a clean kennel environment. And then thank your lucky stars that you've found a good breeder and do your best by her puppy by giving it all the love and guidance it deserves.

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