

the breeder checklist

By Pat Long

This following lists are suggestions. Tailor them to suit your requirements. If health and longevity are of utmost importance to you, give more weight to that section. If temperament and obedience is more important, give additional weight to those issues.

These checklists are designed to give people who have never bought a dog a basis for evaluating different breeders. All breeders are not alike, and they will each emphasize different priorities in their breeding programs. What you will want to do is to find a breeder that you are comfortable with, someone who won't change her phone number after you buy the puppy. The breeder should want – or better yet require – feedback from you as the puppy grows. She should want to know of any problems or the lack of problems in order to continue to make the most informed breeding decisions.

This checklist is something that you should be able to fill out with ease after talking to each breeder. If there are things in here that you do not understand, read more about dogs, more about the breed, and more about choosing a breeder. The puppy you select will have a better chance of growing up to be a healthy Berner who can be a loving companion for many years, if you do your research first. There are plenty of puppies available, but finding the right one for you is up to YOU to find, recognize, and develop.

Just as you will have a great many questions for the breeder, don't be surprised if the breeder has some questions about your suitability as the adopter of her puppy! As a matter of fact, if the breeder is willing to part with a puppy without checking into your ability to provide the proper home, beware! A good breeder should be very concerned that her pups will have the very best environment, and won't wind up running loose in the street, dumped at the SPCA, or returned to her because they got too big or just don't go with the color scheme anymore! Add points for each reference that you contact and get good feedback from.

Health Issues:

Sire's hips x-rayed after the age of 18 months	+2
each hip certified excellent	+2
OR each PennHIP DI < .55	+2
Dam's hips x-rayed after the age of 18 months	+2
each hip certified excellent	+2
OR each PennHIP DI < .55	+2
each parent's littermate with CHD (max of -5)	-1 each
parents' littermates' hip status not known (max of -5)	-1 each
Sire's elbows x-rayed after the age of 18 months	+2
each elbow certified normal	+2
Dam's elbows x-rayed after the age of 18 months	+2
each elbow certified normal	+2
each parent's littermate with ED (max of -5)	-1 each
parents' littermates' elbow status not known (max of -5)	-1 each
Parent's eyes tested clear within the past year	+2
either parent has produced a pup with PRA	-5
each pup produced by dam and sire tested clear within the last year (max of +5)	+1 each
(if any pup with PRA was produced, no addition here)	
Sire's thyroid tested normal	+2
Dam's thyroid tested normal	+2
Sire's heart tested normal	+2
Dam's heart tested normal	+2
if breeder knows age and cause of death of any of the 28 grandparents, great-grandparents, great-greats	+1 each

(Note: don't be scared by mention of specific health problems. All dogs have health problems in their pedigree. It is more important to know what the problems are, and whether the breeder knows what they are!)

Breeder Knowledge:

• goes to shows regularly	+2
• has dogs that have finished (CH)	+0
• member of national or regional Berner club	+1
• holds or has held active club position	+2
• actively does obedience/draft/agility	+2
• knows and freely discusses breed health problems	+5
• openly discusses these problems are in her line, or in dogs she has lived with	+5
• pedigree not supplied before sale	-10
• questions you thoroughly on the things you have to offer a puppy and on qualities you hope to find in your pup	+5
• you like her & get along. You want her as your adopted mother!	+10
• Information from her is free flowing, and you perceive her as a good mentor and educator	+10
• wants you to visit her home or kennel	+2
• dogs are all clean and well cared for	+2
• dogs are all indoor dogs and well behaved	+2
• claims every dog in the litter is a show dog	-5
• takes time to explain how she determines if a pup is show potential, breeding potential, and will discuss qualities of specific puppies with you if you ask	+5

Contract and Guarantee:

Guarantee given	+1
<i>(Note: look very carefully at any guarantee. For example, if the breeder will replace your pup if it develops hip problems, but you have to return it to the breeder, could you give up your 2 year old dog, or would you decide instead to get expensive surgery without any financial help?)</i>	
Contract available before sale	+5
any co-ownership costs & responsibilities clearly spelled out and reasonable for you both	+5
Deposit required before you have the contract	-5
requires dog to be returned to her if you are unable to keep it, and spells out terms costs/refunds of the return	+5
sells a bitch as a breeding bitch with puppy back requirement to anyone — whether they are knowledgeable about breeding issues or not!	-5
does not urge you to breed a dog if you have no interest in a lifelong commitment to the dogs you might produce	+5
won't sell a breeding potential dog unless you demonstrate knowledge, and have breeding goals that work well with hers	+5
requires demonstration of breed knowledge, desire to learn more before breeding, and dedication to any pups produced before selling you a breeding potential pup	+2
Contract stipulates that dog will be assessed at 18 months or older before it is deemed suitable to breed	+2
If you want a show quality pup and are willing to pay for it, great! But if the breeder's contract requires you to complete the requirements for an AKC championship ("finish") the pup even if you don't wish to do so	-5
companion pup sold with limited registration, only	+2
companion pup sold with spay neuter requirement, only	+2
companion pup sold with Ltd reg, and sp/n req, both	+5
hip and elbow x-rays required by age of two	+5

Temperament:

• dam not shy (this is NOT the same as aloof)	+5
• sire not shy	+5
• dam not aggressive or nippy	+5
<i>(Note: if the dam is pregnant or the pups are on the ground, this cannot always be determined)</i>	
• sire not aggressive or nippy	+5
• breeder thoroughly socializes puppies	+5
sound and tactile stimulation	+1
• mental development, overcoming obstacles	+1
• exposure to other dogs	+1
• exposure to people	+1
• exposure to children <i>(Note: add your own special requirements here)</i>	+1
• breeder won't release puppy before 7 weeks	+5
• breeder seems to have sound basis for, and recognizes differences in each pup's temperament, has plans for helping pups with any problems to develop weaknesses into strengths	+?

(Note: you won't be able to judge how accurate the breeder is with this until you've had one of her pups for at least a year, so who knows? So get references, particularly for any pups she considered a difficult or challenging placement, or a pup placed with someone who wanted a different one, but took the one the breeder recommended instead)