

So What Does A Responsible Breeder Do That Earns Them That Title?

A responsible breeder of dogs is ALWAYS a student. They devote hours to learning as much as they can about their breed, studying breed specimens, canine health, behavior and training.....in other words, they become canine experts. Now there is no college or university to go to learn all about these things, so how do people learn?

1. They study the breed standard. AKC has printed standards, a video featuring real dogs as examples and most breed clubs have detailed information such as illustrated standards and elaborations of the written standard.
2. They attend dog events. By looking at lots of dogs of their breed and studying the pedigrees of those they like, they learn about different lines and which ones are most likely to produce the attributes they want in a dog.
3. They become involved with dog clubs. Each breed has a parent club (ours is the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of the United States, Inc.) and in some parts of the country there are Specialty Clubs devoted to individual breeds. All clubs sponsor educational programs and events that offer learning opportunities.
4. They read, read, read! There are many books available about every aspect of the dog experience. There are books devoted to individual breeds, to many breeds, to health, to breeding and whelping, to genetics, to behavior and all types of training. They usually get magazines, too. Most Parent Clubs publish a magazine or newsletter.....ours is called "The Rhodesian Ridgeback".
5. They own videos.....it might be the AKC video devoted to their breed standard or of their National Specialty. These are great tools to review and reassess from time to time.

A responsible breeder knows their dogs. Every dog is the best in the world to its owner. A responsible breeder is someone who can step back and honestly evaluate the good and bad points without that love they feel for the dog getting in the way. Most will tell you that their first dog, often the one they loved the most, was the ugliest, dumbest or clumsiest dog they ever owned! That's honesty!)

Why would such a detached point of view be a good thing? Because breeding dogs is a lot of work. Good breeders know that if they are going to exert all of this effort and money, a better dog needs to be the result. To reach that goal, they need to be able to see their dog's faults and virtues in order to find a mate that can help eliminate the faults and/or enhance the good points. To do that, they need to use every educational tool at their disposal.

The best way to make sure that you don't suffer from "kennel blindness" is to match your dog against others in a conformation show. If you want to breed a better dog, you've got to have one and be able to know one when you see it! If your dog is a success at the shows, you'll be more confident that you really can make a contribution to the breed.

A responsible breeder conditions his dog. Good puppies start long before there's even a gleam in the eye. Both the sire and dam require constant care and conditioning to produce the best offspring. This means regular veterinary care, screening for genetic problems like eye problems or hip dysplasia and things specific to Ridgebacks, pre-breeding tests, like brucellosis and regular exercise and good nutrition.

It also means maintaining the dog's mental health. Stressed-out animals can experience fertility problems and breeders believe that the dam's temperament affects the puppies. Good breeders avoid breeding shy, unstable or mean tempered dogs. (Contrary to old wives' tales, a nervous or high-strung dog is NOT well bred - just the opposite!)

A responsible breeder is someone devoted to their puppies. If a breeder wears a lot of hats before the puppies come, now they become nursemaid, nutritionist, nursery school teacher, doggy psychologist and poop-scooper extraordinaire!

The first couple of weeks, Mama Dog normally takes care of most of the pups' need. Of course, there are always the unusual situations such as a dam with no milk or an orphaned litter! Still, the breeder must provide a safe, very warm, draft free and dry place for the puppies and 3 or more times the normal amount of food and water for the mother.

Once the puppies begin to eat on their own, they become a lot of fun - and a lot of work! The normal clean-up, feeding, grooming, training, vet care and playtime needs to be multiplied by 4, 6 or 10 times! In a late 1980's study of 35 litters, the breeder spent an average of 345 HOURS with mom and the pups!

A responsible breeder is someone who places their puppies wisely. As you can imagine, once it becomes time for those little tykes to go to new homes, a litter owner has invested a lot of themselves in them. Now comes the hard part - letting go and making sure they go to families who will provide for them the kind of home they'll need for the next 10-13 years. Add adoption counselor to those hats!

Responsible breeders know that the negatives are just as important as the positives. They make sure that potential owners will have a lifestyle suited to handling and living with the dog before a pup ever leaves.

Responsible breeders learn to ignore the financial realities in order to find just the right home for each puppy. That same study done in the 1980's showed an average loss per litter of nearly \$1,275....and it did not account for the litter owner's time. (My last litter, I stopped counting after \$2000! And I don't even recall the month of May!)

A responsible, ethical breeder is responsible for life. The fun part of being a breeder is having those great families selected call with news of puppy's escapades...first tooth, first birthday, first dog event...and getting letters, holiday cards with the dog's picture included and getting family portraits with the dog smack in the middle. This is the glory of being a breeder.

But they take the time to hear those calls asking how to cut toenails to "We're getting a divorce" and neither can keep the dog and they take the dog back &/or find it another home. Responsible breeders are there for all situations - both good and bad. **They know that they were responsible for this dog being born so that they are responsible for it until the day it dies.** They are in fact, the puppy owners new extended family.....dog-in-laws!

Oddly enough, responsible breeders know that the saddest, but best phone call is the one they receive 12 + yrs. later, telling them that the dog died of old age. They know they were responsible for bringing years of love and joy in that home, just as they experience from their dogs.

Another important thing to remember - ethical breeders rarely have puppies on the ground without them being placed already. Occasionally, someone backs out or there is an extra pup or two, but BEWARE the "breeder" with a bunch of puppies or several litters of different ages to sell! You must be prepared to be on someone's "list". Regardless of what you might think - **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO HAVE A PUPPY IMMEDIATELY!** This is called impulse buying and those are the folks most likely to wind up with a bad deal.

The place to start is the [Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of the US' Breeder's Directory](#). Remember to visit as many breeders as possible to see how they keep their dogs, how you feel about being "connected" to these people and to see if your family really wants to be owned by a Ridgeback.

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