

Evaluating Breeders

To the best of our knowledge, the breeders you see here on the EGNA website are bona fide Golden Retriever fanciers, known by other respected fanciers active in the Golden Retriever world in the US and Canada, and many are known by us personally. We believe they are breeding with the best interests of the breed at heart, and follow the guidelines and recommendations of the national Golden Retriever club in either the US or Canada, or both.

Many breeders today have a website. If so, check it over carefully. It should provide you with a general overview of the breeder and their dogs. Occasionally we are asked for our thoughts on a breeder not on this site. For many reasons, we don't comment on breeders not listed here. However, here is some information to help you evaluate breeders, those that are here, and those that aren't.

MISSING INFORMATION

Breeder's Name: When we look at a website, we like to know the name of the person or persons behind the kennel name.

Dogs' Registered Names and Pedigrees: Well-known breeders of good reputation have nothing to hide. Their dogs' full registered names are listed with their photographs - not just "Fluffy" and "Buffy." Registered names are necessary in order to review the dogs' pedigrees and verify accomplishments and genetic health screening information.

Dogs' Genetic Information: It is helpful if breeders provide the specifics of hip, elbow, eye, and heart exams.

In *North America*, claims of hip and elbow clearances can generally be verified online with the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA):

<http://www.offa.org/search.html?action=new>

and/or with the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) in Canada at:

<http://www.ovc.uoguelph.ca/cfm/hip-elbow/search/advanced.cfm>

Most North American breeders register their dogs' ophthalmologist exams with the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF). CERF does allow owners to register their dogs' ophthalmology exams with them but not release their dogs' information to the online database, though that certainly defeats the purpose of the system and this is not a common occurrence. Since hereditary eye disease can develop at any age, GRCA specifically recommends ophthalmologist exams for the life of dogs that are bred and in

posting the results of all health exams on an online database. CERF numbers indicate the dog's breed, its individual registry number, the year of the exam, and the dog's age in months. Here is an example: GR-25588/2008-77. Below is the link to CERF's online database:

<http://www.vmdb.org/verify.html>

The *British Veterinary Association* (BVA) provides a hip, elbow and eye health registry. This registry is used, not only by the dog owners in the UK, but by many others all over Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and even some in the United States, even though many of these areas have their own systems. Dogs registered with the BVA can be verified online at:

<http://www.the-kennel-club.org.uk/services/public/mateselect/test/Default.aspx>

The *Swedish* site, www.rasdata.com, provides hip, elbow and eye exam results in Swedish, for dogs examined in Scandinavia at this link:

<http://www.rasdata.nu/golden/>

Select "*Leta efter en speciell hund här*" and the first letter of the dog's registered name. This will bring up an alphabetical list of dogs' names. Locate the dog and click on its name. Any results available on the dog will be listed, as well as those of their offspring that have been examined.

Australia has their own canine health registry through the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), though as mentioned previously, some breeders use the BVA:

<http://www.ava.com.au/about-us/programs-1>

New Zealand also has a canine health registry:

<http://www.vetspace.org.nz/content/hip-dysplasia>

VOLUME

Q: Is there anything wrong with breeding more than 3 or 4 litters a year?

A: High volume breeding is always a concern. It can be extremely time consuming to properly raise, socialize, care for a litter, evaluate prospective puppy buyers and then prepare puppy packets for the new owners. Once the right home has been found for each puppy, additional time is spent in helping families prepare for the new puppy, locating puppy classes, a good veterinarian and so on. Additional time is spent on follow-up with owners on this and previous litters. Isn't this is the type of breeder you want? They are available for the life of the dog for help and guidance. There is only so

much time in a day, so, if this the type of breeder you want, chances are the high volume breeder can't fill this role. When you see several litters being offered within a short period of time, perhaps you might want to review the breeder's situation to determine if they might be overreaching and won't have time for you.

OTHER

Q: What's better, to buy a puppy from a private breeder or a commercial kennel?

A: While it is physically possible to get a healthy puppy from a commercial kennel, dealing with a private breeder that is passionate about the breed and its preservation gives you your own personal breeder - someone who has time for your questions, and wants you to contact them first if you have any problems. Commercial kennels have little interest in you after the sale. The same, of course, can be said of puppies sold at pet stores, and the staff knows very little about the puppies they sell, and the puppies aren't bred with the same care and knowledge as the breed fanciers. Those puppies come from commercial kennels or private breeders who breed only to make money. So the general rule of thumb is that the commercial kennel is breeding strictly for profit, often selling whole litters to retail outlets. And the retail outlets sell to anyone with the money to buy the puppy. They don't do the screening of buyers that you see with a breeder who has put so much effort, care and concern into each litter.

Private Golden Retriever fanciers compete in shows and performance trials with their dogs and prove their quality. They truly know each and every dog they own and do extensive research in selecting a mate for them. If the best choice for a stud dog for a particular bitch is a dog owned by someone else, then that is the choice. If the bitches brought to them for service to their stud dogs do not meet acceptable guidelines, they decline the service. It's not about the money!

Private breed fanciers continually seek information about the breed, breeding, and genetic advances. They are knowledgeable about the breed's history and original purpose. They usually belong to a dog club - a source of education and information. They also develop a wide circle of friends and acquaintances that are also dedicated to sharing their lives with Golden Retrievers - breeding, showing, training and so on. The preservation of Golden Retrievers as a mentally and physically sound sporting breed is of the utmost importance to them.

QUALITY OF THE DOGS: It can be difficult for those not involved with dog shows to

critique the physical appearance of someone's breeding stock and puppies. To the untrained eye, it can be true that "all puppies are cute." Sometimes puppies that look a little pathetic elicit protective feelings in us and we want to "save" the puppy, so we pursue contact with the breeder. But if the puppies look "bewildered," overheated, cold, or in dirty conditions, something is wrong. They should look clean and robust, active and happy or sleeping sublimely. However, activity increases with age, so don't expect to see 3-week-old puppies racing around.

Championships: The difficulty in earning the different championships varies. AKC and CKC championships are the "gold standard" in North America. When you see a dog residing in the U.S. listed as simply "Ch. So-and-So," it is expected that this dog is an American Champion (earned through AKC shows in the U.S.), or for dogs residing in Canada, it indicates that it is a Canadian Champion (earned through CKC shows in Canada). If you see a dog in the U.S. listed as Am. & Can. Ch. So-and-So (or a Canadian dog named Can. & Am. Ch. So-and-So), it indicates that it has earned this competitive title in both the US and Canada.

The international shows in the U.S. and Canada are run under different rules and competition is not always necessary to earn the title, so the title of International Champion is not as significant. Earning an International Championship (Int. Ch.) is a fun experience and the dogs are judged according to the standard of the country of origin. British-style Goldens tend to fare better at International shows than at AKC dog shows. However, the requirements for this title are minimal, and reputable breeders are aware that these are not illustrious titles and don't make exaggerated claims of their dogs' quality based on their, or one of their ancestors, having earned the title.

There are also championship titles in the different countries overseas, and most of these demonstrate success with competition. It's unlikely (but not impossible) for an imported dog to have achieved one or more of these foreign championships, however it's fairly common to see them in their immediate ancestors.

When the dogs in website photos look "odd" compared to the photos of the Goldens on the websites you see here, you may want to ask the breeder what specific structural qualities they feel each dog has to offer their breeding program. They should be able to articulate their strengths and weakness based on the breed standard. Their breeding stock should look like Goldens, act like Goldens, and have the appropriate genetic screening information readily available. And if the dogs look submissive, shaggy, dirty, or just generally unkempt, you may wonder if that's the "norm." Well, it's not.

TEMPERAMENT: The Golden Retriever breed standards are fairly clear on

temperament. Below is an excerpt from the AKC standard for Golden Retrievers:

Temperament: Friendly, reliable and trustworthy. Quarrelsomeness or hostility towards other dogs or people in normal situations, or an unwarranted show of timidity or nervousness, is not in keeping with Golden Retriever character. Such actions should be penalized according to their significance.

You should expect a young puppy to be quite lively and in need of total supervision, lots of training, love and attention. In their enthusiasm, some puppies will mouth people's hands and feet. An experienced breeder will help you through that. When meeting adult dogs, one should expect them to be outgoing and friendly - never shy or distrustful. Also, this is a sporting breed. They are expected to be alert and have the energy, interest and aptitude for various tasks; and the ability to get along with other dogs.

COLOR: In addition to genetic testing for hips, elbows, hearts and eyes, most reputable breeders select breeding stock based on things like temperament, intelligence, structure, breed type and so on. They do not select dogs based on an extreme color shade (such as being very pale) and use that as a selling point, claiming or just implying this makes them special, rare, unique, or more valuable. Most breed standards around the world provide for a wide spectrum of shades of gold.

EXAGGERATED CLAIMS: Generally speaking, reputable breeders don't make generalized claims of the superiority of their dogs and their lineage that are impossible to verify. Reputable breeders know that there are many excellent dogs, breeders, and lines of Goldens available, and a description of imported dogs as coming from "the finest kennel in Europe" is strictly a matter of opinion. And pedigree alone is not an indicator or breeding quality. Every litter has dogs that are not up to breeding standards. It's all about selection. Anyone can claim that their dogs are superior specimens, but if they are not intimately familiar with the breed standard and Golden Retriever structure, movement, and breed type, it's only one person's uneducated opinion. Dog shows and conformation assessment programs are a proving ground for quality. GRCA offers their Certificate of Conformation Assessment (CCA) to evaluate Goldens against the breed standard who are not going to compete in dog shows. Information on this program can be found at:

<http://www.grca.org/pdf/events/cca/CCAProgramOutline.pdf>

Instead of claiming to be the "one and only" breeder you can trust, with the "finest dogs available," a good breeder will represent their dogs factually and realistically, and

encourage puppy buyers to contact several reputable breeders and deal with whomever they feel most comfortable. Puppy buyers who follow that advice will generally recognize when they've found the breeder and litter that's right for them. If they have nagging doubts, they should move on.

FALSE CLAIMS: Occasionally a breeder will falsely claim membership in either the Golden Retriever Club of America (GRCA) or the Golden Retriever Club of Canada (GRCC) - or both. Occasionally this occurs because a member lets their membership lapse (knowingly or accidentally), but they forget about the claim on their website. You can verify membership in GRCA (U.S.) by contacting the GRCA Membership Chairman, Deb Ascher, at GRCAMembers@aol.com, and claims of membership in GRCC (Canada) can be confirmed by contacting GRCC Membership Chairman, Brenda Wilson, at bwilson@islandnet.com.

PUPPY PRICE: Puppy prices vary from one area to another. They can vary according to the achievements of the parents and grandparents, and the proven quality of dogs previously bred by the breeder. Prices are often higher in large metropolitan areas where the cost of living is higher. This can raise veterinary costs, and other costs. But prices that are twice the average, are never justified, even if the breeder tells you it's because they are "rare English Cream Goldens" from "the finest lines in Europe." Initially, there are extra expenses for breeders to import dogs from overseas, however this doesn't justify excessive fees far above the area's norm for well-bred Golden Retriever puppies.

SCREENING BUYERS: You have to wonder when someone is willing to sell you a dog without any restrictions. Most reputable breeders sell their breeding quality dogs with full registration ONLY to other breeders they know personally or by reputation. And they only sell their companion-quality puppies on spay/neuter contracts to people who they've thoroughly checked out. You'd likely have an easier time adopting a child. If a breeder is eager to ship you a puppy, no questions asked, continue your search.

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE: Normally, with experience comes knowledge, but you shouldn't assume that, just because the breeder says they've been breeding for 15 years, they are knowledgeable about the breed, its structure and movement, or whether any of their puppies have potential for dog shows; obedience, rally, or agility trial; hunt tests; hunting; etc. True fanciers have studied the breed standard and many books and videos by breed authorities on canine structure and movement, and the fine points of breed type. There's no reason to think that someone who has never shown their dogs is knowledgeable about correct structure and movement, and other aspects of the Golden Retriever breed standard. Also, if they haven't trained and competed with Goldens in

an AKC, CKC, or UKC performance event, they can't possibly evaluate their own dogs or their litters for those purposes. What they may have learned over time is how to avoid answering, or simply pooh-poohing, specific questions that you've learned to ask - things that you can verify.

ARM YOURSELF

Please Read....

The Code of Ethics of the Golden Retriever Club of America:

<http://www.grca.org/thegrca/code.html>

and/or *The Code of Ethics of the Golden Retriever Club of Canada:*

<http://www.grcc.net/?q=node/126>

The AKC Golden Retriever Breed Standard:

http://www.grca.org/history_breed/breed_standard.html

and/or *The CKC Golden Retriever Breed Standard:*

<http://www.grcc.net/?q=node/117>

Especially helpful

The Golden Retriever Club of Canada's Illustrated Breed Standard:

http://www.grcc.net/files/club_documents/GRCCIllustratedBreedStandard.pdf

What Exactly Is An "English" Golden Retriever:

<http://www.englishgoldens.net/pdf/WhatExactlyIsAnEnglishGoldenRetriever.pdf>

"Rare White" Goldens:

http://www.grca.org/allabout/a_doodle-white.html#white

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Thank you for seeking information before making a commitment on a puppy.