

Choosing a Breeder

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*"If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable,
you disconnect yourself from what you truly want,
and all that is left is compromise."
Author: Robert Fritz*



You should be choosing your breeder before you think about choosing your puppy.

Somewhere along the way you've been introduced to the Tibetan Mastiff breed. You've seen a picture in a magazine or met one at the dog park and have now decided that this is the breed for you. You've decided to start investigating in earnest, have scoured the Internet and now want to start approaching Tibetan Mastiff breeders about the upcoming breeding season. Just as many breeders have an extensive screening process prepared, prospective puppy buyers should feel obligated to interview any breeder that they approach. Be it over the Internet or a telephone conversation, reputable breeders welcome inquiries about the breed, their dogs, their individual breeding programs and upcoming litters.

Where do you start? Why it's NOT all about Geography!

While it may seem like the logical place to start, it is sheer folly to restrict the search for your breeder and puppy based solely on geography. By all means go ahead and visit with a local breeder to get a feel for the Tibetan Mastiff breed but deciding on a puppy purchase simply because a breeder is conveniently located near you may not be in your best interest. Proximity does not guarantee that you will come away with a working breeder/owner relationship or have found the perfect match in your puppy.

Oftentimes prospective puppy owners place a lot of emphasis on the perceived disadvantages of dealing with a long distant breeder. Potential puppy owners may be reluctant to deal with breeders from a distance because they feel they are "purchasing a dog over the Internet." If potential puppy owners take the time to educate themselves and correctly interview their breeders of choice, acquiring a

canine companion need not be akin to an eBay transaction. Do not assume that distance will diminish the advantages of a knowledgeable and experienced breeder or the quality of a puppy that you may discover.

How much is that doggie in the window?

Cost is often the definitive consideration when it comes to deciding on a specific puppy. Prospective owners sometimes feel that proximity naturally means that a puppy will cost less. For example, traveling fees should be less if you choose nearby breeding facilities as there may not be crate or flight costs to take into account.

While the purchase price of a Tibetan Mastiff puppy may seem exorbitant to the average person, establishing and maintaining a breeding program is extremely expensive. Daily maintenance, food, upkeep of secure facilities and health care ensures that reputable breeders enjoy a giggle when it is said that dog breeding is money making venture. From your perspective be guided by that fact that caring for a TM is a 10 - 14 year commitment. The initial purchase price is, in reality, a small cash outlay when you tally up how much you will be paying over the coming years.

Some things to consider about that purchase price

While it is true that breeders determine their own prices for the puppies in a litter, be aware that not all breeders or puppies are created equal. You should be aware that all breeders do not share the same criteria. Some prices vary according to a set "show" and "pet" quality standard while some breeders sell each puppy for a fixed price. Make sure that you understand exactly what is included in that purchase price. It will be up to you to decide what is best for your circumstances and to reflect on the pros and cons of what your breeder of choice is offering to you.

A higher or lower purchase price may include:

- a breeder's pledge to be available to you as a resource over the coming years
- the breeder's knowledge to guide you along the way as your Tibetan Mastiff matures and presents you with various behavioral and/or health challenges
- the breeder's help with official documentation when it comes to registration
- direction and mentoring should you become a Tibetan Mastiff breeder

As opposed to:

- no breeder support
- exhausting efforts to find a source of information so that you can learn about the Tibetan Mastiff breed if no breeder support is provided.
- unnecessary demands and future breeding obligations placed on you and your dog. There is a tremendous responsibility associated with breeding a litter of puppies and don't be fooled into believing that it is a money making venture. If you have no initial intentions to become a breeder when you begin looking

- for a puppy, DO NOT enter into any arrangements that compel you to breed your Tibetan Mastiff.
- a breeder withholding registration papers unless you fulfill his/her wishes
 - strings attached

Use the Internet and the telephone to your advantage

Consider, instead, that technology really has made it much easier to reach out all across your country and, even around the world, as you research many different breeders at once. While the Internet allows for easy access and the exchange of information, it also allows for misrepresentation and the exchange of misinformation. Yet, if prospective puppy owners are willing to make the effort, the Internet opens up the possibilities to thoroughly investigate and explore your options.

To help potential puppy owners overcome their nervousness about beginning their search, to aid you in conducting a breeder interview and help you make informed decisions, we're providing an inclusive list of questions to have on hand. The answers to these questions are the initial steps in helping you determine what is important to you and allows you to focus on the freedom of choosing both the correct breeder and, eventually, the perfect Tibetan Mastiff for your family.

It's simply a combination of common sense and instinct.

The Common Sense Questions

How long has this person been involved with the breed? How many dogs does this person have? How many litters has s/he bred?

- **Red Flag:** Puppy millers and disreputable breeders have no problem telling you that they perform health checks on their dogs when, in reality, they do not. If any breeder is unwilling or unable to provide you with proof of certification, terminate your interview with him/her.

Ask about comprehensive medical checks on breeding stock. For example, does this breeder regularly do hip/elbow x-rays on proposed sires and dams? Do they have thyroid evaluations done? Do qualified veterinarians and radiologists and such organizations as the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or equivalent organizations certify the dogs?

Is the breeder willing to show you documentation of certification?

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Question this breeder about the various health issues of his/her dogs. Does s/he seem honest and straightforward about the strengths and weaknesses in his/her lines?

- **Red Flag:** There is no such thing as a perfect dog and ALL lines contain strengths and weaknesses. Do not continue an interview with any breeder that

states s/he has no health issues with his/her dogs and, therefore, does not screen for such potential problems as hip dysplasia or hypothyroidism.

Does this breeder register his/her dogs and puppies with an official registering body such as the American Kennel Club (AKC) or the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)? What about paperwork and pedigrees?

Does the breeder have a working knowledge of the ancestry/pedigree of his/her dogs? Can s/he supply you with pictures of sire and dam, grandparents and great-grandparents?

Has this breeder taken an acceptable amount of time to speak/write to you about the various characteristics of the breed? Do you feel you have a practical and balanced overview of the breed?

- **Red Flag:** The Tibetan Mastiff is a wonderful breed to care for but it is a VERY challenging one. Has this breeder rushed to tell you all about the positive attributes of the breed without discussing the difficult aspects you will face? While you are understandably excited about getting a puppy, do you feel rushed or pressured into a purchase?

Do you feel that the breeder has done a good job interviewing you? Do you feel that s/he has a good understanding of you, your family, your home, your lifestyle and your expectations?

- **Red Flag:** Of course acquiring a Tibetan Mastiff ordinarily involves a financial transaction but puppies are not products crowding a Wal-Mart shelf that are made available to anyone who has the cash to spend. Do you feel that you have provided this breeder with sufficient information so that s/he can feel confident in a puppy placement with you or do you feel this breeder is more concerned with a money exchange?

Does this breeder provide a comprehensive information package?

Does this breeder require that you sign a contract? Ask to see a copy and review the individual terms.

- **Red Flag:** It's perfectly fine for breeders to vary in their policies when it comes to guarantees and refunds but make sure that YOU are comfortable with their practices. If you're looking for a money-back guarantee as it pertains to certain health issues and this breeder doesn't offer any, it's best to know that beforehand.

Does this breeder provide you with ample time to ask questions as you educate yourself about the breed?

Does this breeder seem at ease when you suggest that you would like to visit to see the sire, dam and puppies? If you are unable to visit the breeder's facilities, does this breeder provide you with a good sense of his/her set-up?

- **Red Flag:** Question any breeder that continually deflects your intentions to visit his/her facilities and dogs. Be wary of a breeder that insists that you meet elsewhere to deliver a puppy or shows up with a car full of puppies for

you to choose from. Steer clear of breeders who sell their puppies through pet stores or on demand.

Does this breeder take the time to socialize his/her dogs and puppies?

Does this breeder follow definitive guidelines as it pertains to worming or a vaccination protocol? What kind of health care do the puppies receive?

Does this breeder identify his/her puppies by tattoo or microchip?

Question this breeder about how involved you will be during the selection process of your puppy. Some breeders allow total participation in your personal selection and some reserve the right to choose what they feel will be the best puppy for you. Neither practice is incorrect; it is simply a matter of preference and style.

Does this breeder have experience with getting puppy to an airport and understanding the paperwork/procedures involved with air travel? Is this breeder concerned about the puppy's welfare and only books flights that cause the least amount of stress to the puppy?

When can you expect to welcome your new addition into your home?

- Red Flag: Tibetan Mastiff puppies are typically ready to go to their new homes by the time they reach 8 - 12 weeks of age. Be very wary of breeders who want to send your puppy home prior to that.

Is this breeder willing to work with you by offering informational support and advice even after you've brought your puppy home? Do you feel confident that this breeder will be available to answer any questions that you might have?

Is this breeder willing to take back a Tibetan Mastiff puppy should you no longer be able to care for your dog?

- Red Flag: Reputable and responsible breeders never want to see Tibetan Mastiffs dumped in shelters, humane societies or with the unsuspecting guy who answers the "Tibetan Mastiff to Give Away" ad you place in the weekend paper. Always make sure that your Tibetan Mastiff has a great home! If you can't provide one, make sure that your breeder of choice offers a strong support system for the lifetime of your dog.

Questions that will speak to your instincts

What is the focus of this person's breeding program? Does this breeder have an established breeding program that is well thought out? What goals, policies and ethics does this breeder adhere to?

- Red Flag: Breeding practices vary from breeder to breeder but there are general basic guidelines to follow. Reputable breeders encourage health checks on all dogs included in a breeding program and discourage using immature females who are far younger than 2 years OR are not experiencing their second heat cycle. (Important note: Since Tibetan Mastiff females normally only go into heat once a year we must make this distinction. Girls may be somewhere between 18-24 months when experiencing their second

heat cycle.) Responsible breeders also do not, by and large, encourage their females to have more than 3 or 4 litters over the lifetime of the dog. If you have any doubts after listening to the outline of a specific breeder's practices, search for voluntary codes of ethics on breeder websites and learn about fundamental breeding practices.

Does this breeder seem interested in all aspects of the Tibetan Mastiff? Does s/he freely communicate his/her philosophies concerning health, temperament and conformation? Does this individual know and breed to the Tibetan Mastiff Breeding Standard?

Does this breeder spend time bashing other breeders, their breeding programs and their dogs?

- **Red Flag:** The initial contact that you have with a breeder should be all about his/her breeding program, the interest that you have in his/her dogs and expected puppies during the breeding season. You do not need to listen to any breeder bad-mouthing any other breeders or their dogs. Truly reputable and enthusiastic breeders understand the considerable effort it takes to rear puppies and be completely involved with the welfare of their own dogs. Responsible breeders also realize that significant energy must be put aside to mentor newcomers to the breed and educate potential puppy owners. Be wary of breeders who seem motivated to reflect negatively on others and look upon fellow Tibetan Mastiff breeders as the "competition". It is always best to be cautious around those breeders who feel the need to convince you that only their dogs are the best.

Does this breeder network with other breeders? Is s/he willing to offer you references or referrals to other reputable breeders should you prefer to look elsewhere?

Is this breeder actively involved in contributing to the future of the breed by volunteering his/her time with organizations or mentoring newcomers?

Does this breeder promote and protect the breed positively by making hard yet appropriate decisions concerning the placement of puppies? Is this breeder upfront about being willing to say "NO" to your request for a puppy if s/he doesn't feel that a placement will be successful?

Regardless of whether you are a novice starting out on your first Tibetan Mastiff adventure or an experienced TM caregiver, the process of choosing a dependable breeder and an ideal puppy shouldn't be a harrowing undertaking. Being prepared and asking the right questions will go a long way in teaching you more about the breed and enjoying the Tibetan Mastiff companion you eventually welcome into your home.

Tibetan Mastiff Response Network
Tibetan Mastiff Info
<http://www.tibetanmastiffinfo.com>