



# BMDCA Info Series

## Tips on Buying a Bernese Mountain Dog

2009 #12

**Is a Bernese Mt. Dog Right for You?** ► Every breed has a typical size, temperament, character, and breed-specific health problems. Are you sure a Berner is right for you and your family? A responsible breeder will go out of the way to guide you to an appropriate breed choice – maybe a Berner, maybe not. Beware of a breeder whose only goal is a quick sale.

**Looking For a Berner Pup?** ► Are you looking for a puppy that will mature into a healthy, long-lived dog? Do you want a dog that will grow up with your children? Do you know that the 2005 BMDCA Health Survey reported that the average Berner lived 7.9 years? Do you know that diseases such as allergies and cancer run in dog families, just as in human families? Responsible breeders research and test for canine health problems and breed to minimize and eliminate them from their dogs. They know the life-span and cause of death of most of the dogs in their pedigrees and breed for longevity. This level of commitment to research and knowledge is directly related to the quality of dogs they produce, and they willingly and honestly share their knowledge.



**Have You Done Your Homework?** ► Research the breed and breeders BEFORE you visit. Your chosen companion will be with you for many years to come. Time spent now will save heartbreak in the future. You will find many Berner pups for sale across the country, but price is not an indicator of quality. Bernese are becoming quite popular, and demand is growing. They are not as rare and expensive as some would have you believe. A responsible breeder will ask about \$1,200 - \$2,000 or more for a puppy and provide a detailed record of family health, temperament and longevity. A pet store, for-profit breeder or broker may ask \$3,000, and know only the vaccination and worming records of that single puppy or litter. AKC registration, or any other registration, does not guarantee health.

**Not All Bernese Are Alike** ► Like people, dogs are individuals. Breeders do not produce “carbon copy” litters. The gentle, good nature of Bernese should never be taken for granted. Some are aggressive, and some are very shy. Such dogs are a serious burden for any family. Responsible breeders strive to breed only the best-tempered dogs. They invite you to meet their dogs and tell you the family temperament history.

Bernese are well known for serious orthopedic problems, such as hip and elbow dysplasia, which can lead to a life of crippling pain, limited activity, and burdensome veterinary expenses. Generally, these problems are genetic, and a

responsible breeder tests to minimize the chances of producing them.

**Internet Research and Buying** ► The Internet is a valuable source of information as you research different breeds and breeders. Many dog clubs and dog fanciers have websites filled with information. Careful study will be valuable.

However, the Internet also caters to instant gratification – the “I want a puppy NOW” trap. Breeders who want fast sales and few questions asked or answered thrive in this environment. Responsible breeders can be found here too, but YOU must WORK to identify them. Ask lots of questions and insist on clear, verifiable answers. Any time you shop long distance, Internet or otherwise, seek accurate information about the living conditions and backgrounds of the breeder’s dogs. Puppy mills exist because, knowingly or unknowingly, dog buyers support them. Responsible breeders with websites are proud of their lines and feature the registered names, titles, and health clearances for their dogs prominently on the website. Be a smart Internet shopper and know where your puppy got its start. The best approach is to find a local breeder you can visit in person.

**Responsible Breeders** ► As you interview breeders, evaluate their business practices and commitment to the breed and to the individual dogs they own, breed and sell. If you feel uncomfortable at any time listen to your “gut feelings” and look elsewhere. Your dog’s breeder should be someone whom you will feel comfortable calling any time in the future if you have questions or concerns about your Berner. You should feel that person will be there for you, not take your money and disappear. Never commit to a purchase or place a deposit without a written contract (including a guarantee of AKC registration papers) with which you are comfortable, a multi-generation pedigree, and detailed family health history. Written records of all transactions and agreements are your protection if problems arise and can save much heartache.

Responsible breeders breed with the goal of attaining the ideal in breed type, health and temperament. They aim to improve each generation and know that markings alone do not make a Berner. They invest substantial time, effort and resources in learning about and understanding the breed. If they are new to the breed ask, about their breed mentors who guide them in the history and knowledge of the breed. Breeders should explain their goals to you, both long-term and for a current litter. They should give you specific answers, not just “I want to produce nice puppies for nice people.”



For more information, please visit our website at [www.bmd.org](http://www.bmd.org) or [www.bmdca.org](http://www.bmdca.org).

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Conscientious breeders take the time to be certain that this purchase and this puppy absolutely are right for you and stress the importance of staying in touch so they can track their puppies as they grow and use their evaluations to improve their breeding programs. If you aren't certain that you are dealing with a responsible, caring breeder, **please don't buy the puppy.**

### **What to Look for/Buyer Beware ►**

#### **Sales Approach:**

Look for a breeder who:

- ✓ wants to get to know you and understand your expectations in a dog and tries to match puppy temperament and character to you and your family
- ✓ invites you to visit his/her dogs and facilities
- ✓ encourages you to take your time in making the decision to add a new family member
- ✓ provides evidence of the quality of the sire and dam as well as their ancestors and relatives, via pedigrees, proof of titles, health and genetic clearances, and information on ages and causes of death

Beware of anyone who:

- ✗ is anxious to sell you a dog before getting to know you and without regard for your needs and those of the puppy
- ✗ won't allow you to visit and see his/her dogs and facilities and wants to deliver your puppy to you somewhere else
- ✗ requires a deposit before providing the pedigree, contract, and health information
- ✗ rushes you to make a decision
- ✗ sells puppies under 8 weeks of age
- ✗ uses superlatives such as "top lines," "excellent orthopedics" and "no health problems" without validating these claims for all generations of the pedigree, especially the sire and dam
- ✗ makes generalized statements that dogs imported from other countries are "healthier", "sounder" and "bred to higher standards" without proof of such claims

#### **Quality & Honesty of the Information Provided:**

Seek a forthright breeder who:

- ✓ discusses both positive and negative aspects of the breed
- ✓ evaluates each puppy for strengths and weaknesses and seeks to match you with an appropriate puppy
- ✓ asks you a lot of questions about lifestyle and expectations with the goal of a successful lifelong puppy placement
- ✓ encourages questions and provides clear, specific answers
- ✓ provides information on the care and training of a Berner
- ✓ is open about the number of dogs owned, where and how they are housed, and the activities in which they participate such as conformation, obedience, agility, draft, etc.
- ✓ explains the goals and results of his/her breeding program

Steer clear of anyone who:

- ✗ avoids discussing the prevailing problems in the breed or uses only sweeping generalizations that are flattering to the breed, his/her dogs, or the pup being sold
- ✗ considers all the puppies to be wonderful and right for you
- ✗ has show-quality puppies at premium prices but is unable to explain why they are show-quality other than proper markings
- ✗ avoids or discourages your questions or takes offense at what is asked

- ✗ doesn't provide advice on grooming, feeding, and training
- ✗ is vague about the number of dogs owned, where or how they are housed, what dog-related activities in which he/she participates, etc.
- ✗ won't discuss the results of the bitch's previous litters

#### **Sales Agreements/Contracts:**

A conscientious breeder:

- ✓ has a well-defined contract that clearly spells out the terms and conditions of sale, the responsibilities of both seller and buyer, and explains how the future of the dog is protected
- ✓ provides well-defined written guarantees, and takes the time to be sure you understand any requirements you must fulfill to validate the guarantees
- ✓ uses spay/neuter agreements and/or limited registrations for all pets and dogs that may not fulfill breeding-quality potential due to genetic faults
- ✓ will mentor your involvement in the breed if you wish to become a breeder yourself

Beware of anyone who:

- ✗ does not use a written contract at all or presents one that fails to protect the dog and/or the buyer
- ✗ provides guarantees without outlining the details or conditions of those guarantees. (Guarantees can be contingent on the buyer performing in a way that may not be possible or desirable. If a guarantee requires you to return your puppy, would you want to do that?)
- ✗ requires you to breed your puppy when it grows up without regard to quality. Do you understand the responsibility and commitment required to breed? What will happen if you change your mind? Will the breeder repossess your dog?
- ✗ requires that you keep a male dog intact so the breeder can use him for breeding. Do you understand the challenging aspects of managing a stud dog?
- ✗ requires your dog be shown at your expense. This could also necessitate long absences from your family.
- ✗ doesn't use limited registration and spay/neuter requirements in contracts for all pets and dogs that do not fulfill breeding-quality potential due to genetic faults
- ✗ doesn't have any restrictions or future involvement with the buyer when selling pups with full registration
- ✗ sells a pup for one price with full registration and another price if the same pup is on limited registration

#### **Dog Club Affiliations and Other Issues:**

Responsible breeders:

- ✓ are members of recognized dog clubs that actively seek to protect and preserve the future of the breed
- ✓ do NOT sell breeding pairs
- ✓ do NOT buy dogs or puppies from others for immediate resale. This is brokering, done for profit, and shows no commitment to the breed
- ✓ provide references upon request
- ✓ will take a dog back and/or assist in re-homing
- ✓ will care enough to call from time-to-time to see how your pup is doing and whether you have any questions or concerns

**Closing Thoughts ►** There is a lot to consider when buying a dog. First, decide on a breed. Then find a responsible breeder who will work with you and for you in finding the right pup. Doing your homework is worth it because you are looking for a new best friend!