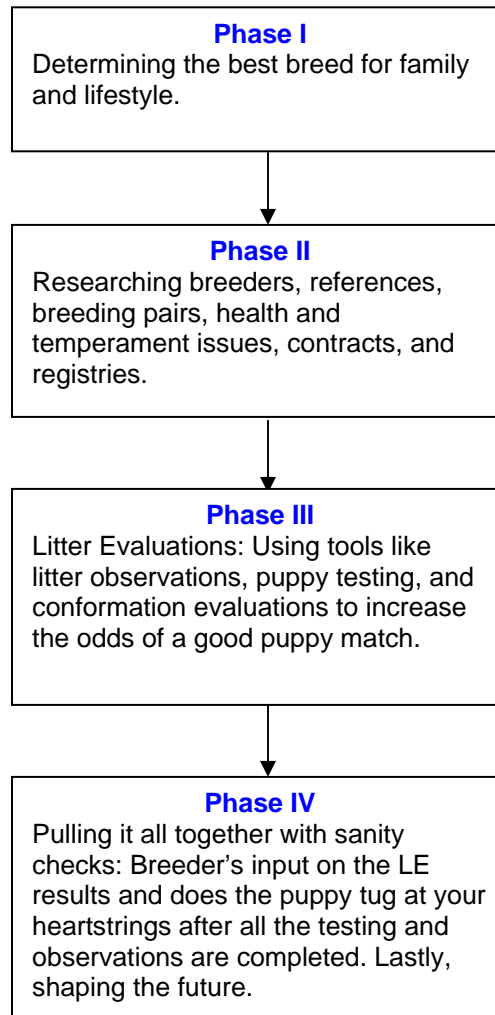


Marlette's Puppy Selection Process (PSP)

Introduction and Overview



Why do I need a Puppy Selection Process--because I know the difference between a good Shiloh and a not-so-good Shiloh. I know how difficult it can be to live with a dog that does not meet my criteria. I also know how difficult it can be to rehome a dog with a problem. In addition, I believe a dog is a lifetime commitment although I feel there are exceptions such as hobby breeders who need to rehome breeding stock, people whose life situation has changed due to unforeseeable factors, or a bad match that could lead to harm if not resolved. When I plunk down my money for a Shiloh puppy, I want to know that I have done everything possible to ensure a good match which I define as a happy, healthy, and stable puppy that meets my temperament criteria.

I share this process with those who are interested in learning how to minimize risk when selecting a puppy. I do not believe it is the only process to use nor do I say it is the best process to use. I readily admit I am not an expert in puppy testing, temperament, or canine behavior. What I have developed comes from my personal experiences over the course of my lifetime as well as years of research on the subject—nothing more and nothing less. **Although the process is tailored for Shiloh puppy buyers, the concepts presented are universal to puppies of all breeds.**

1. Phase I: Determining the Best Breed for Family and Lifestyle

- 1.1. Researching Breeds and Traits—Understanding Form and Function and Matching Same to Lifestyle and Logistics
- 1.2. Using Breed Selector Tools
- 1.3. Review Breed Specific Questionnaires
- 1.4. Research the History of the Breed
- 1.5. Field Research—See the Dogs in Person

1.1 Researching Breeds and Traits—Understanding Form and Function and Matching Same to Lifestyle and Logistics

Many people ignore this step and in my opinion it is the most critical. Prospective owners need to assess their lifestyle and family interaction. Do you want a breed that will play with the kids (fetch a ball, stick, or Frisbee)? Do you want a breed that requires little exercise or grooming? Do you want a big dog, a medium-sized dog, or a little dog? Is anyone in the house allergic to dog dander—do you need a breed that does not shed much? How about temperament—do you want a breed that will grow up to be a good watchdog or do you want a breed that could care less about barking at strangers or barking at all? Do you want a breed that shows aptitude for training? All of these factors and more need to be determined when you are looking at prospective breeds. Each breed comes with certain generalized characteristics—the reason the breed was developed in the first place.

It is necessary for you to research prospective breed traits so you can narrow down your selection. You can do this by researching breeds in books or on the Internet. I list a few Internet sites to get you started:

Purebred Dog Breeds: <http://www.dogbiz.com/group-index.htm>

Dog Owner's Guide to Breed Profiles including mixed breeds: <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/tprofile.html>

Your Purebred Puppy: <http://www.yourpurebredpuppy.com/>

Finding a dog or puppy the right way: <http://members.aol.com/debradownsth/>

AKC recognized breeds: <http://www.akc.org/breeds/>

UKC recognized breeds: <http://ukcdogs.com/RegBreedGroups.htm>

The only problem with the sites listed above is you usually will not find information about rare breeds.

Use the following sites to find information about Rare Breeds:

ARBA: <http://www.arba.org/>

Rarities: <http://www.raritiesinc.ca/>

Dog Owners Guide: Rare Breeds: <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/raredogs.html>

Canadian Show Dogs: Rare Breeds: <http://www.angelfire.com/bc2/CKCShowDogs/group9R.html>

1.2 Using Breed Selector Tools: In addition, there are sites that can help you determine the best breed for your family using what is called a Breed Selection tool. Based on questions about your lifestyle and requirements, the Breed Selector tool helps you better define your wants, needs, and requirements for a dog. I list a few below:

K9 Country: <http://www.k9country.com/>

Dog Breed Info Center: <http://members.aol.com/debradownsth/>

Animal Planet's Dog Breed Selector: <http://animal.discovery.com/guides/dogs/selector/selector1.jsp>

Select Smart: <http://www.selectsmart.com/DOG/>

About Dogs: http://www.about-dogs.com/dog_breed_selector.htm

Purina Dog Breed Selector: <http://sy.adiho.com/ASA/Controller?sysid=4&appid=9901>

Again the problem with most of the Breed Selector tools is that they do not take rare breeds into consideration. However, they can help you determine the type of dog that best fits your family and lifestyle. Then you can always check out the rare breeds sites to see what other breeds fall into the group that you might want to investigate. They will not help you narrow down a mixed breed combination either, but if you know what went into the mix, they can help you learn about the temperament and traits you could be dealing with.

1.3 Review Breed Specific Questionnaires: Several breeds offer questionnaires specifically designed to educate you about the detailed needs of a particular breed. If you are on the ShilohZone and interested in Shilohs, you can check out "So, You Think You Want to Own A Shiloh?" It can be found here:

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http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ShilohZone/files/PUPPY_RESEARCH/ (you must be a member of the ShilohZone for this link to work).

1.4 Review the History of the Breed: I think it is important to learn all you can about the foundations of any breed you are seriously considering bringing into your family. If it is a mixed breed, you will need to study the various breeds involved in the mix so you have an idea of the different temperaments and traits you could be dealing with. For people interested in Shilohs, the only breed history we have is the Origins article written by the breed founder: <http://www.shilohshepherds.info/origins.htm> (or link to it from the Zone Links page).

The foundation stock of Shilohs is the German Shepherd Dog (GSD). Some lines called the MAW lines are said to have a Malamute cross in them. Some lines have outcrosses, most of these are German Shepherds either White GSD, German import GSD, or American bred GSD. It behooves anyone interested in Shilohs to research German Shepherds. Shiloh temperaments run the gamut from soft to hard, with and without working traits, and are larger than typical German Shepherds. In addition, Shilohs are said to be bred to have less drives than typical German Shepherds. So depending upon what you want in a dog, research the lines—that is a good indicator of temperament. If you are looking at an outcross puppy, often defined as the first three generations of a Shiloh bred to an outcross, researching the GSD breed can be especially important depending on the type of puppy you are looking for.

1.5 Field Research—See the Dogs in Person: There is nothing better than “field” research. Find people who own the type of dog you are interested in and ask them questions—many, many questions. See if you can arrange to meet with them and interact with their dogs. Check with local pet food suppliers or training clubs to find out about AKC or UKC shows in your area or check out AKC or UKC web sites for event calendars. If you are on the Zone and interested in Shilohs, post a message indicating what city you live in and hopefully a Zoner in your area will respond. Dog shows are a great opportunity for “field” research. For Shilohs or other rare breeds, check out the ARBA, IABAC, Rarities, and RBCSWO web pages for their show calendars. Once you have narrowed down the breed, you are ready to move to Phase II.

2. Phase II: Researching Breeders, Breeding Pairs, Health and Temperament Issues, Contracts, and Registries

The key to Phase II is learning the right questions to ask and being able to interpret the responses. And it can get even more complicated because sometimes a buyer likes a breeder but not the breeding pair to be used or visa versa. So it is important to determine your criteria for a puppy ahead of time, and then find a breeder who you believe can produce the traits you are looking for. The odds of a "perfect match" are rare so you do need to consider what you are willing to compromise on and that can include health testing, health guarantees, contract clauses, price, logistics (the ability to attend the litter evaluation in person or have the puppy shipped to you), etc. Sometimes it boils down to waiting for the right litter or if you are in a hurry for a puppy, it means compromising on some of your criteria.

Breeders

- 2.1. References
- 2.2. Reputation
- 2.3. Kennel Facilities
- 2.4. Puppy Raising Process
- 2.5. Honesty About Lines

2.1 References: Talk to people who have purchased puppies from the breeder. How helpful has the breeder been? Would the customer buy another puppy from this breeder? If possible, find someone who experienced a problem and see how they felt about how the problem was resolved or handled (if not resolved). Make sure you get both sides of the story because there are always two viewpoints when there is a problem. Do not fall for pretty web sites—ensure there is substance behind them. Check out the local Better Business Bureau--have their been any complaints filed against this breeder? If you are on the ShilohZone, you can check out the Shiloh Buyers Advocacy Rating System (SBARS) database.

2.2 Reputation: Listen to the "jungle drums" on any Internet breed lists you are on and follow up privately with people you respect. The truth is out there if you take the time to look for it. If the state in which the breeder resides requires pet dealers or kennels to be licensed and the breeder fits the state's definition for licensing, ask for his or her state license number and verify it with the issuing agency.

2.3 Kennel Facilities: Nothing paints a picture of a breeder better than how he or she keeps his or her dogs. I look for cleanliness, food, and shelter but just as important for me is where my puppy is raised. I want a puppy that is raised as

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part of the family, not in a kennel. I want to know that my puppy is exposed to noises, people and dogs coming and going, and lots of love and attention from the time he/she enters this life right up to the time I take him/her home.

2.4 Puppy Raising Process: What is the breeder's philosophy of puppy raising? Does the breeder use the Super Puppy Program (<http://www.breedingbetterdogs.com/achiever.html>) Where are the puppies raised? What kind of stimulation do they get? What does the breeder do with regards to noise, socialization, health, etc.,? Will you receive a health certificate signed by a vet? Is it a law in that state that you get a health certificate when you purchase a puppy? Will the puppy be crate trained (even more important if the puppy is to be shipped to you)?

2.5 Honesty About Lines: It is not the breeder who tells me about problems in his or her lines that I fear—it is the breeder who tells me he or she has no problems that scares me. Any breeder who breeds long enough is going to encounter problems—it is a fact of life. What I want to know is what, if anything, did the breeder do once the problem was identified. I also want to know what the breeder's goals for his or her lines are and how he or she plans to achieve those goals.

Breeding Pairs

- 2.6. Expectations of Pairing
- 2.7. Littermate Information (LMI)
- 2.8. Seeing is Believing

2.6 Expectations of Pairing: Check out the breeding stock--do the dogs appeal to your senses? Why did the breeder breed these two dogs? What does he or she expect to see in the progeny? What are the potential weaknesses and potential strengths of this litter? And run from the breeder who says he or she does not expect to see any weaknesses—that is the definition of a breeder who is kennel blind. Then ask for references (names of puppy owners) or if you are on the ShilohZone, check out the Photo sections of the Zone or Gallery to see if any Zoners own puppies related to this pairing and contact them privately. You can also do what some people do--post a message stating you are looking at a particular pairing and you would like to communicate with owners of siblings (if this is a repeated litter). If you are interested in showing conformation, do the parents have titles? If you are interested in working dogs, do the parents have any working titles or do they exhibit working traits? If the litter is advertised as "working," what proof can the breeder provide that working traits exist in the line? The first thing to look for is working titles: obedience, herding, Schutzhund, agility, or certified in therapy or SAR. If neither parent has a title, the next best thing is to ask for information about the sire and dam's puppy temperament tests (look at the scores for retrieve drive, problem-solving, food motivation, etc., or even better, did either sire or dam have a PAWS test done when they were puppies). Has either parent had any training in obedience, herding, agility, etc.? How did they do, did they like it, did they train easily (ask probing questions)? Just because a breed is part of the herding group (or working group or sporting group) does not mean the puppy can work which is unfortunate when you consider that dogs in these groups were bred for a function that today many cannot perform or have no desire to perform. The very traits that people come to expect in a breed often get lost over time in some lines so if working traits are important to you, the puppy testing will become even more significant especially if the parents do not have working titles.

2.7 Littermate Information (LMI): Is this a repeated litter and if so, does the breeder have any information on the previous litter? If not, ask for contact information of the customers of prior litters or half sibling litters (litters the sire and dam have on the ground with other breeding partners). If it is a first litter for sire or dam, get contact information on customers of siblings of sire and dam. Good breeders collect as much LMI as they can and keep detailed records but as always, life is a compromise and if you cannot get LMI information, data on siblings, half-siblings, parents, and any other relatives is better than nothing.

2.8 Seeing is Believing: Visit with the sire and dam in person if logically feasible. There is no better predictor of temperament than the temperament of the sire and dam. If visiting in person is not possible, try to find someone who has interacted with them--maybe at a show or event--or try to find someone who can visit with them and report back to you. Bottom line—do the sire and dam represent the kind of dog you want to own?

Health Testing

- 2.9. Proof of Testing
- 2.10. Types of Health Testing
- 2.11. Health Issues in the Lines

2.9 Proof of Testing: Ask about health testing on the breeding pair and ask to see proof (either the dogs are listed in the OFA health database, or the owner can supply a copy of PennHIP results, or if the dog only has OFA prelims and you are willing to accept this, ask to see a copy of the prelim reports and a copy of the TLI report for EPI). I have pretty high standards so not all breeders are doing all the testing I like to see done. You will have to decide what you can live with (or without). Shilohs are subject to all the same health problems as German Shepherds. The next section describes the types of health testing I look for in prospective parents:

2.10 Types of Health Testing

- OFA Hip certificate and/or a PennHIP report (even better if they can supply this information for several generations and not just sire and dam)
- OFA Elbow certificate
- OFA Heart certificate (should be updated every two years)
- OFA Thyroid certificate (should be updated every two years)
- CERF certificate (expires after two years)
- EPI test (TLI) should be done at least twice (over a period of a couple of months) to see if the score is dropping or if EPI is in the lines, it should be done prior to each breeding
- DNA test (DNA is on file with a reputable agency)
- vWd Negative (von Wildebrands disease) if sire or dam is a GSD outcross

2.11 Health Issues in the Lines: Ask about issues in the lines. Some lines of Shilohs have a genetic predisposition for certain health issues. Ethical breeders will be honest about their issues—good, bad, and/or ugly. I do not fear the breeder who is open and honest about his or her issues. Anyone who breeds long enough is going to produce some health issues—it is what he or she does about them that separates the wheat from the chaff.

Temperament Issues

- 2.12. Temperament Data
- 2.13. Adult Temperament Tests
- 2.14. Temperament Issues in the Lines
- 2.15. Litter Evaluation

2.12 Temperament Data: The first thing I ask for is information on the litter evaluation report for both sire and dam, if available. How did they score as puppies? Does the current owner believe they “lived up” to the test results? The difficult part of this analysis is that not all temperament tests are created equally, and if the test was not conducted and interpreted correctly, the results could be compromised and that will affect an owner’s responses to this question. So it is necessary to ask probing questions as well—ask how the dog responds to certain stimuli (cats, kids, first-time visitors, small dogs, big dogs, etc.). What is the dog’s personality at home versus in public? Is the dog territorial, does it have prey drive? What is the owner’s favorite story about the dog? What is the owner’s worst experience with the dog? People look for different things in a dog so a “wrong” answer for you could be another person’s “right” answer. Then I want to know if the dog passed an adult temperament test and if so which test, and can I see the scores?

2.13 Adult Temperament Tests: This is a very important data element when searching for a puppy. Can the breeder provide copies of the adult temperament tests for the sire and dam? As stated earlier, the best indicator of temperament in puppies besides the puppy TT is the temperament seen in the sire and dam. I am very prejudiced on this subject—I believe the best adult dog temperament test available today is the American Temperament Test Society’s (ATTS) test (<http://www.atts.org>). I am as proud of earning this certification on my dogs as I would be of any working or conformation titles. But life is full of compromises and many registries will accept a Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test with gunfire (<http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/index.cfm>) as an adult temperament test. My problem with this is that I feel the CGC is more of a training capability test than a true temperament test. I believe a dog needs to be tested under stress inducing conditions like the scenarios presented in the ATTS to really assess its adult temperament.

2.14 Temperament Issues in the Lines: Because we know elements of temperament are inherited as well as influenced by environment, the best way to learn about a puppy’s potential temperament is by evaluating the sire and dam and grandsire and grandam if possible. As I mentioned previously, I use what I call “probing questions” to better assess the temperament of a sire and dam. I ask the same questions about the grandsire, grandam, and siblings (sometimes this information is not available). I ask owners to tell me stories about the dogs under a particular set of circumstances such as: how does the dog react to strangers, to loud noises, to groups of people in public, to a squirrel, rabbit, or cat? I tailor the questions to investigate the traits I am looking for and those traits I would rather avoid.

2.15 Litter Evaluation: You should ask about the litter evaluation (LE). Will a puppy LE be conducted, by whom, and will you be able to attend? Can you get a copy of the puppy temperament test to be used in advance so you can study it? Will you get a copy of the results? I always score the tests myself when I attend an LE, but I like to see what the “official” results are as well. If the breeder does not allow people to attend the LE or does not provide copies of the LE results, this is a “red flag” for me. A compromise would be the ability to see a tape of the LE before you make a final decision.

Contracts

- 2.16. Know the Laws of the Breeder’s State and Your Own State
- 2.17. Deposit and Purchase Price
- 2.18. Buyer Responsibilities
- 2.19. Clarity and Fairness
- 2.20. Clauses and Operational Definitions

2.16 Know the Laws Regarding Contracts in Your Breeder’s State and Your Own State: The first step in contract evaluation is to know the laws governing pet purchases in the state in which the contract was created, if any. You should also know the laws that govern the sale of puppies in your own state as well, if any, but it is usually the state in which the contract was created that has precedence. However, even armed with this knowledge, it is important to know and I quote from the Shih Tzu site listed below: **“If you purchase a puppy out-of-state, even if your state and the state where the animal was purchased have Lemon Laws in place, it is nearly impossible to get a replacement puppy or financial reimbursement across state lines.”** I am going to add “if your breeder is an unethical breeder.” Ethical breeders uphold their contracts and that is why you need to research breeders carefully and ensure the one you choose has a good reputation. However, finding information about state laws is not always easy. I spent hours researching for this information in my own State of California and if not for a great Maltese site (<http://www.malteseonly.com/lemon.html>) and Shih Tzu site (http://www.stfsc.bizland.com/leg_lemon22.htm), I would still be searching! I have seen references stating that 19 states have passed Puppy Lemon Laws, but I could only identify 15 of them: AR, AZ, CA, CT, FL, ME, MA, MN, NH, NJ, NY, PA, SC, VA, and VT. You can read up on the laws in each of these states here: <http://www.malteseonly.com/lemon.html> (You can also check the AKC Legislative Alerts site: http://www.akc.org/news/sections/legislative_alerts.cfm for the most up-to-date legislative actions involving canines.)

In some states the laws do not apply to hobby breeders or kennels unless they produce a certain number of puppies per year. And this number varies—in California it is 50 dogs/puppies per year, in New York it is 9 per year, and in Florida it is 2 litters per year or 20 puppies per year whichever figure is greater. Nonetheless, it is good to know what laws pertain when purchasing a puppy in a particular state. In addition, some of the states require certain verbiage be in contracts as in mandatory refunds for certain issues making the “replacement puppy only—no cash refund” clause null and void. Some states even require that health certificates completed by veterinarians accompany each puppy sold. In addition, some airlines have health certificate requirements before they will fly a puppy.

One of the advantages to knowing the laws pertaining to your breeder’s state is that you can quickly discern an ethical breeder from an unethical or uneducated breeder (one who is not familiar with his or her own state laws). Lastly, some states require pet dealers (this is associated with the number of puppies/dogs sold per year--in other words in California you are a Pet Dealer if you sell 50 puppies/dogs per year; in Florida you are a Pet Dealer if you sell 2 litters or 20 puppies/dogs per year (whichever number is greater); and in New York you are a pet dealer if you sell 9 puppies/dogs per year) to be licensed and you have a right to see this license or to get the number so you can verify it with the state. So if a breeder tells you he or she is a “licensed breeder,” make sure you verify that if he or she meets the requirements for state licensing, he or she really is licensed with the state and not just his or her own breed organization. **It is important to note, however, that just because a breeder lives in a state that does not have laws regarding pet purchases or pet dealers, it should not mean that you view this as a negative reflection on that breeder.** Most states do not have laws governing the average hobby breeder. Each state, as you can see from the above links, takes a different approach to laws regarding pets (and some states find no approach works best for them). The best indicator of an ethical breeder, with or without applicable state laws, is the results of the research you conduct on that breeder or breeders.

2.17 Deposit and Purchase Price: Is a deposit required and if so, how much? Is the deposit refundable or will it be moved to a mutually agreed upon litter if you do not find a puppy that meets your criteria? I prefer a refundable deposit because many times a good hobby breeder only has one or two litters a year. I could have a long wait to find a “mutually agreed upon” litter. This is very important because until the litter evaluation is completed, there is no way to know if there is a puppy that meets my criteria. In addition, is the purchase price in your range (prices of Shiloh puppies vary)? What exactly are you getting for your money (guarantees)?

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2.18 Buyer Responsibilities: What are your responsibilities as a buyer and can you honor them? Good breeders depend on their customers for littermate information (health and temperament data). If you buy a puppy, you agree to provide this information to help them improve their breeding programs. We expect breeders to uphold their end of the contract—we should also expect customers to uphold their end of the deal and provide the data as outlined in the contract. In addition, if you are purchasing a breed quality puppy on a co-own or breeder's agreement and the puppy passes all the tests required for breeding, are you willing to breed the dog? Are you prepared for the work and responsibilities involved in raising a litter of puppies? These agreements often require you to give a certain number of puppies (or the sales price) back to the breeder. This is not always about more money for the breeder although one does have to consider exactly how expensive one thinks a dog should be. It is often critical to improving the lines for some hobby breeders who cannot keep a large number of dogs on the premises.

2.19 Clarity and Fairness: Another important issue with contracts is to ensure you and the breeder communicate clearly about the contents of the contract. This aspect should be dealt with long before any deposit is put down. Does the contract have provisions that are fair and equal for both parties and does it meet any applicable State Puppy Lemon Laws. If not, you may need to negotiate some of the clauses to better fit both your needs. The contract should be detailed enough so that if a problem occurs, both buyer and breeder understand exactly what the terms will be and how they will be executed. Think of this part this way--if you had to go to court, would the judge be able to look at the contract and say "the verbiage is clear in this document-I find in favor of the plaintiff/defendant (whichever you are). And could you provide evidence to support your case?"

Look to see if the contract is fair to both breeder and buyer? Are there options if problems arise? For example, if the clause is not already covered by a State Lemon Law, is your only option a replacement puppy? What if you buy a show/breed quality puppy and it develops a serious problem covered in your contract? You may not want another puppy--you may need a refund (or partial refund) to deal with medical problems--is that an option? Do you have the option to get a portion of the price back if you want a cash refund (be it for show/breed or pet). I say this because at the \$800 to \$1,500 price range for pet quality, even a pet diagnosed with any of the major health issues listed previously is not "what you paid for." In my opinion, an ethical breeder acknowledges this. Or is the option available to you to work a deal with the breeder that says the breeder will pay you a full or partial refund in cash as soon as the next litter is on the ground and he or she sells some puppies. I like to see options available in contracts.

2.20 Clauses and Operational Definitions: One of the most important aspects of a contract is the verbiage that takes affect if something goes wrong. I recommend you run from what I call "smoke and mirror" clauses. These are clauses such as "no cash refunds period." Or "a full refund only if the puppy is returned." Or "no replacement puppy will be provided unless receipts for a (laundry) list of items is provided." These are clauses designed to make it next to impossible to invoke a clause in the contract when a problem occurs due to emotional or financial reasons. In addition, there are clauses that set up an unfair burden on the buyer such as "unlimited breeding rights" when a male puppy is purchased.

You want the contract to clearly define the issues and answer "what if" questions. Are all aspects of the contract clear and understandable to both parties--are there operational definitions for all invokable clauses? For example: What is the operational definition of hip dysplasia (HD)? Is it a diagnosis from OFA or PennHIP, from the buyer's vet, or from the breeder's vet? Are you required to submit X-rays to the breeder? Are you required to return your puppy if it is diagnosed with HD (or any other ailment) before the clause can be invoked? Do you have options such as a full refund, a refund down to pet quality, or replacement puppy from a mutually agreed upon litter? Is the clause different if you are buying a pet quality versus a breed or show quality puppy? Most importantly, are there any clauses in the contract that you feel you need to renegotiate? Is the breeder amenable to renegotiating them with you?

In addition, look for hidden expenses--make sure you lock in the purchase price and it does not go up once the litter is on the ground. Ensure you have a refundable deposit if you do not find a puppy that fits your criteria after the LE is conducted. Be clear about the picking order and what it requires or entails. Do you have first pick of all puppies, show quality puppies only, or pet quality puppies only? Or is it gender based—you have first pick of the males? If temperament is your critical criteria, the more options you leave yourself open to, the more chances you have of finding the "best match" for you and your family. And on that note, hopefully color is not at the top of your list of criteria! You can find a great synopsis of contract issues here: <http://www.lightningridgeshilohs.com/contracts.htm>

Registries:

There are currently six Shiloh Shepherd Registries:

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ISSR: <http://www.shilohshepherds.org/issr,inc.htm>

NSBR: <http://www.shilohregistry.com/>

SSBA: <http://www.shilohshepherd.org/>

TSSR: <http://www.shilohshepherdtsr.com>

ARBA: <http://www.arba.org/> and NKC: <http://www.nationalkennelclub.com/> register litters when the parents are registered with them.

They each have their own rules and regulations regarding puppy/litter registration. Some allow dual registration meaning you can buy a puppy from a litter registered with Registry A and still register the puppy with Registry B. Some do not allow dual registration. Some only allow you to buy from breeders associated with a particular registry and dog club. If this is important to you, you will need to ensure you are buying from a breeder approved by the registry/club you are interested in joining.

It is important to remember that not all breeders are going to meet all the "standards" I have listed. That is where the compromise part comes in and only you can decide how much you are willing to compromise when it comes to spending \$800 to \$3,000 for an 8-week-old puppy.

3. Phase III: The Litter Evaluation Using Tools Like Litter Interaction Observations, Puppy Testing, and Conformation Evaluations to Increase Your Odds of a Good Match

For me this is the most fun of the four phases, and it is also the most critical to ensuring that I find the right puppy. I studied human temperament testing (I am qualified to administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator also known as the MBTI and used it during my consulting career along with other temperament indicator tools). It gave me an advantage in that I know how well human temperament information can be applied (in the right hands and with the proper understanding), so it was not much of a logic leap to apply the same principles to canines. Once one has grasped the basics, it is a matter of A) finding a good test and qualified tester, B) establishing a set of criteria and C) applying sound principles to the interpretation of the test results.

Litter Evaluations

- 3.1. The Litter Evaluation (LE) Process
- 3.2. Puppy Temperament Tests
- 3.3. Conformation Evaluations
- 3.4. Litter Interaction
- 3.5. Making It Work—Establishing Critical Criteria

3.1: The Litter Evaluation (LE) Process: For some breeders, the LE is nothing more than a marketing tool—it sounds good, looks good on paper, and it brings in customers who think they are getting something special. Ethical breeders know the value of a properly conducted LE, and they understand how to interpret the results in order to help their customers make a good match. Questions to ask: Can you attend? If you cannot attend due to logistics, can someone you trust attend for you or can it be video taped? Who will be conducting the LE? What tests/evaluations will be used. Can you get a copy of them prior to the LE date? As you have seen, many things and a great deal of data go into making a good decision when it comes to buying a puppy. The LE is all about establishing critical criteria, collecting data, and analyzing data to help you make a good decision. A good LE consists of a puppy temperament test and a conformation evaluation. I like to see a litter interaction evaluation as well—it gives me a chance to evaluate the puppy in a group setting as well as individually. Make sure you will receive the results of your puppy's LE in writing. And if possible, ask to see copies of the TT, conformation form, and if there is one, the litter interaction form, ahead of time so you can familiarize yourself with the tests and terms. I score each puppy myself and make notes—this comes in very handy later on when I am tired and all the results (and puppies) tend to run together in my head.

3.2 Puppy Temperament Tests: I believe the important thing to remember about puppy testing is that it shows potential (good and bad)—it does not guarantee anything. In addition, nerves and thresholds in young puppies are difficult if not impossible to assess. The brain is not fully developed at 8 weeks and although genetics play a strong role, environment influences brain development as well. I do believe there are some indicators that show the potential for weak nerves and low thresholds just as there are indicators for retrieve drive, prey drive, good nose, etc. For example, the puppy that is very shy, avoids humans, and lacks confidence and/or the puppy that is sound sensitive is going to have degrees of these

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traits as an adult. On the other hand, puppies that demonstrate no sound sensitivity at 8 weeks sometimes grow up to sound sensitive adults. Weak nerves and low thresholds cannot be cured but they can be “worked” to make them manageable depending on your goals for the dog. And this is crucial to a good match—if you need a dog with strong nerves and thresholds for your goals, do not pick a puppy that displays indicators to the contrary. I have learned over the years that “different strokes for different folks” has meaning for puppy selection as well. Some people want a needy puppy, some people want a very soft, dependent, puppy because that is what they want in a dog. And some people want just the opposite. As we say in human temperament testing—not good or bad, just different. That is one reason I do not list certain responses as “good or bad” in the PPE. I believe “good or bad” depends on the criteria of the buyer.

Having said that, I will also state that I believe stability as defined for our breed in the breed standard under “Character” denotes puppies that are happy; friendly; and curious; they like people; are interested in things around them, brave enough to check out the ‘unknown;’ and will walk towards or look for the source of a strange sound, not run from it. Puppies that do not sit and cry in a maze—they either jump over or find their way out. Puppies who when confronted by a problem, look for ways to work it or get around it. The good news is that Shiloh litters seem to run the gamut when it comes to temperaments—from very soft to hard, from needy and dependent to confident and independent, some with working traits and some without and anywhere in between. It is up to the buyer to determine what he or she needs and/or wants and to go about selecting the puppy that shows the most potential to live up to his or her expectations. Puppy testing can help.

There are many different puppy temperament tests available. Conducted and interpreted properly, most have something to offer. Some are specialized, for example the PAWS Test (<http://www.malinut.com/write/paws.shtml>) is designed to test for working traits. Some like the Volhard (<http://www.volhard.com/puppy/pat.htm>) are designed to evaluate good pet temperaments). For myself, I wanted both aspects covered so I ended up compiling my own set of tests called the Puppy Potential Evaluation (PPE) (see attachments 1 and 2 in Phase IV) and I use the PAWS as a “double check.” Briefly, I review the TT results of the litter I am interested in, and I narrow down my choices based on scores related to my critical criteria and the conformation evaluation (if breeding or showing is important to me, I weight the conformation accordingly). Then I ask for the PAWS test to be conducted on puppies that show potential for working dogs. There should be a rest period between the TT and the PAWS. I like to see the TT done on a pup, then the conformation evaluation, and then take a break for lunch and come back and do the PAWS on the puppies “qualified” to take it (show an aptitude for working during the TT). This gives me a second chance to evaluate specific working traits in a pup and to ensure the first response was not a “fluke.”

3.3 Conformation Evaluation: I do not know whether structure follows form or form follows structure. What I do know is that structure as described in the breed standard is important not only for showing but for working as well. Temperament is more important to me than looks, but I value good structure. Our breed was developed for a purpose—as all breeds are. Our dogs are expected to be able to perform certain functions (even if not called upon to do so), and they must have the proper structure to accomplish this. I have always had a hard time evaluating structure on my own. That is one of the reasons I created the *Shiloh Puppy Conformation Form* (see attachment 3)—it helps me keep track of what I should be looking for in a puppy, and helps me understand what the evaluator is saying as he or she assesses the puppy.

3.4 Litter Interaction: As I was developing my process for selecting puppies, I realized there was a missing piece of data for me—a way to evaluate the puppies in a group setting. Countless times I have heard breeders say “I am so surprised the puppy tested like that—I have never seen him/her do that before” or “I never would have expected that result.” What many people do not understand is that puppies, just like humans, will often respond differently in a group setting than they do when they are alone. This is one of the reasons temperament tests are designed to assess an individual puppy, in a strange place, and the tests are conducted by someone who has had no contact with the puppies prior to the testing. It is the best way to assess a puppy’s reaction to stimuli without bias. I value a breeder’s input, but I also understand that his or her impressions of the puppies stem mainly from seeing them in a “litter environment,” and I take that into account. The Litter Interaction Observation form (see attachments 4 and 5) helps me to better assess the puppy by taking into account his or her responses to stimuli in a group setting. I match this against what the breeder has shared with me as well. This is also good information for anyone who is bringing a puppy into an existing pack. There is a copy of my *Litter Interaction Observation* form attached. The form is based on easily observed reactions and developed for use by anyone.

3.5 Making It Work—Establishing Critical Criteria: Do you know what you want in a puppy (if you cannot articulate it, how can the breeder help you find it)? Do you want a puppy that has play drive or could care less about toys? Do you want a puppy that will grow up into a dog that can compete in obedience, do therapy work, go on hikes, or one that is happy to lay around, has no prey drive, or has a low pain tolerance? There is nothing more wonderful than a puppy that is

a good match—there is nothing so sad as a bad match. And although nothing is full proof and there is always a risk when you are purchasing a puppy, knowing what you want and testing for it can minimize your risk.

What I find helpful is to set up the test sheets ahead of time (the conformation sheet basically does this for you because it does not rely on preferences—it is based on the breed standard). Whereas temperament testing, for the most part, relies on the individual preferences (there are some exceptions) expressed by the potential buyer. I highlight my “ideal” response to each test response in one color, but I use a different color for what I consider to be “critical criteria” responses. Finally I record the actual responses in a third color. This makes it easier for me to compare and contrast puppies when I sit down to review the test and conformation results.

4. Phase IV—Pulling It All Together

- 4.1. Sanity Checks
- 4.2. Heartstrings
- 4.3. Shaping the Future

4.1 Sanity Checks: Hopefully the breeder has updated you throughout the growing up process and provided pictures, statistics, and observations (this of course is the ideal situation). Now you want to sit down with the breeder and get his or her input on the data you have collected during the testing, conformation evaluations, and litter observations. Does the breeder agree with the LE results and if not, why? Can the breeder expand on any of the critical criteria results? Does the breeder agree with your puppy choice? And if the breeder does not agree ask him or her to explain why? It is very important to hear what the breeder has to say about the test results, but you should also factor in what I mentioned previously—the breeder’s observations are based primarily on a “group setting” so do not be surprised if the test results do not always match the breeder’s impressions. In addition, the quality of the breeder’s impressions relate directly to how good the breeder is at raising puppies.

4.2: Heartstrings: When all is said and done and you have narrowed your choice down—does the puppy tug at your heartstrings. You have to assess this last because if you are like me, all puppies tug at your heartstrings. When I hold this puppy, does it feel right or am I thinking about some of the aspects of the LE? Does this puppy match my critical criteria? If I made some compromises based on the data obtained, are they compromises I am going to be able to live with? It is important to note here that environment, especially when dealing with young puppies, can minimize or maximize traits. Compromising on certain traits does not mean the puppy cannot learn to do something or to develop stronger instincts for a behavior. It means an owner may have to work harder at enhancing (or reducing) the trait. For example, some puppies show a natural ability to retrieve, some do not. It is much easier to train a puppy with natural tendencies than one who shows no interest. However, patience and a hard work can usually pay off if the puppy has all the other traits you are looking for. On the other hand, a puppy with low drives is not going to be a good candidate for Schutzhund work. By looking at the data first and then assessing your emotional response, you are more likely to come away with the best puppy for your needs. Remember, a puppy is supposed to be a life-long commitment so make a good decision for you and for the puppy.

4.3 Shaping the Future: Now that you have selected your puppy, the real work begins! No matter how good the genes, the conformation, or the traits—if you do not train your puppy to be a good companion, you might as well forget about all the research you did—it will go right down the drain. In order for your new puppy to develop into a good canine citizen, you must define what it means and takes steps to ensure it becomes a reality. This includes some kind of training hopefully with behavioral aspects blended in. It is good for you and the puppy to attend a class (hopefully more than one). This is a win-win for training and socialization—there are many books available to help you choose a good trainer. And training does not end in class—training must be reinforced at home, in public, and for a lifetime. In other words you reap what you sow—you have a partially developed puppy brain at 8 weeks—give him or her the nurturing environment to fully develop all the great potential you observed during the puppy testing!

Conclusion

It is important to remember that the PPE shows potential—things like nerves and thresholds are very difficult to assess in 8-week-old puppies. There are indicators—good and bad depending on what you are looking for—and it behooves a buyer to get familiar with them. Nor can health issues always be predicted in 8-week old puppies. The best way I know to conclude Marlette’s Puppy Selection Process is to say that I used this process with all four of my dogs (all obtained as puppies), but with process improvements all along the way that led to the creation of the PPE. They were, in fact, my field testing for this process. My dogs are not perfect—I deal with some serious issues. For example, my first Shiloh was

diagnosed by an orthopedic surgeon and confirmed through both OFA and PennHIP as having moderate to severe hip dysplasia at 8 months.

I often learn my best lessons the hard way. In this case, it never occurred to me that a hip rating for a Shiloh being bred could be “bestowed” by someone who was not a radiologist, an orthopedic surgeon, or did not work for OFA or PennHIP but that was the case. It did not occur to me to ask to see proof of testing, and I paid the price for my stupidity. My next two Shilohs were purchased from parents that were both OFA certified and although my dogs hips are not as tight as I would like, they were not dysplastic at 8 months and to date, show no signs of becoming dysplastic. It pays to do the research regarding health testing. I paid \$1,500 for a puppy said to come from healthy stock and from a breed with a lower incidence of hip dysplasia (instead of trusting the published word, I wish I had thought to check out the OFA database for the truth of that statement). I ended up paying twice that to maintain my dog’s quality of life (and I do not regret doing it—I regret that it was necessary). Had I done what I espouse in this document, I would never have purchased my first Shiloh puppy from that breeder because the research would have negated the sale.

Life is full of risks. Sometimes you can do “all the right things” and still run out of luck. I also have a dog with Enzyme Pancreatic Insufficiency (EPI). There was very little information available on EPI in Shilohs when I bought her. There is always going to be risk involved in purchasing a young puppy—the best we can hope for is to do everything possible to reduce the risk and put the odds in our favor. When it comes to temperament, it becomes even more difficult to reduce risk.

I have great respect for and belief in puppy temperament testing, again, when the test is a good one and properly conducted and interpreted, but I understand that nerves and thresholds are difficult to assess in young puppies. I have one Shiloh that is dog aggressive, one Shilohs that over reacts to new situations and my first Shiloh is a spook—I am not happy about these character flaws but I deal with them. I will share that I find these “warts” much easier to deal with because I got so many of the traits I wanted (my critical criteria) in each one of these dogs. So much so that learning to manage the “warts,” and we do work on the issues around here, seems a small price to pay. I have said many times on the Zone that I do not regret Kiera, my first Shiloh, but I would never want another one like her. I stand on that statement, but I am very proud of the progress Kiera has made over the years—she is still a spook but I hope to compete with her in obedience in the future. If the foundation is there, even warts can be dealt with if one has patience and fortitude.

I do not think I would have the will or the enthusiasm for dealing with these health and temperament issues if my dogs did not display on a daily basis so much of the critical criteria I established. And many of their more serious issues, like the dog aggression, do not surface unless I take them off my property. I get to interact, for the most part, with dogs that meet or exceed my criteria and that is what keeps me excited about this breed and wanting another Shiloh in the future. I would not trade a one of my dogs—they have (and hopefully will continue to) taught me so much about training, behavior, research, nutrition, health, etc. I have even higher hopes for the future with all the improvements some of the breeders not associated with the ISSR are making.

We all have different criteria for the type of dog we want—I am convinced using this process will help you do a better job of selecting a puppy. It will not eliminate your risks, it will not guarantee anything, but it will put the odds in your favor.

I have attached the forms I described in this document for your convenience. I highly recommend you read the instructions sheets before trying to use the forms.

Attachments

- 1) Instructions for the Puppy Potential Evaluation (PPE)
- 2) Puppy Potential Evaluation (PPE)
- 3) Shiloh Puppy Conformation Form
- 4) Instructions for the Litter Interaction Observations (LIO) Form
- 5) Litter Interaction Observation (LIO) Form

I wish one and all a happy, healthy, and stable puppy! If you have any questions about the information presented in this document, feel free to contact me at: 74452.525@Comcast.net or join us on the ShilohZone: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ShilohZone/>

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Dedication: *I dedicate this "process" to all future puppy buyers in the hopes that they find the kind of puppy that grows into the type of dog they have always dreamed about.*