

Evaluating Puppies
By: Wendy McQuiston
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Evaluating puppies can be a task fraught with frustration. I know people who pick their puppy before they are dry. I know one who is seldom wrong when she stays with this method. It doesn't work for me.

I base my selections based on watching them all the time they are maturing. When they are out in the yard, without intervention from the big "kids", I watch to see which one is "the trotter". I am ecstatic if the majority of the puppies are "trotters". It has stayed true that those dogs are generally the best movers. That is NOT to say that all trotters are the best in the lot. It's just a starting point for me.

Temperament and aptitude are of great importance to me so I do the puppy aptitude test and use those results along with my own observations of their responses and temperament as they are maturing. The aptitude test also gives the opportunity to know which puppy might need a little more work/socialization in order to be the best he/she can be.

As they are developing, I also follow the guidelines in "How To Raise a Puppy You Can Live With". Some of them seem weird. Some almost seem heartless but they are all designed at the appropriate time to provide something that they need during that development period. I believe so strongly in this that I mark on the calendar what is to be done when and follow it religiously.

At 8 weeks of age, I do a "study" of the puppies to see what is there that I like the best and dislike the most. Write it down! But, as someone else noted, I put more stock into my 12 week assessment than the 8 week one. I still want one who trots. Stacking them is sometimes difficult.....either frozen into behavior or wiggling madly! So, I like to look at them on the ground when they stop naturally. Taking puppy shenanigans into consideration, I make a note as to which puppy has the front legs UNDER him/her.....WAY under.....not under their chin! Which one has the rear with the strongest, straightest appearance from the rear? Bend of stifle when stopped? I hate having puppies when it's cold because I like to spend quite some time each day (when they're old enough to go outside) just watching them move and interact with one another. As they get a little older, I also watch this interaction with the older dogs. I do get them comfortable with stacking.....or, more properly, just standing on the table without flying off and learning that the table can be a fun place. I "treat" them on the table and just ask them to stand there.....not a show stack, just stand. They get rewarded for watching me and just standing.....regardless of how it looks. While they are

standing there on their own, as I'm giving them treats and uttering sweet nothings, I'm also looking at the way they are standing naturally. Yes, I DO actually stack them and feel the angles etc. but with resisting puppies, you may get a false sense of what really is there. I believe that forcing a puppy to stack on the table before he/she learns that the table is fun is cause for LOTS of table problems down the line. It may translate only to posting rather than the dog showing a definite dislike of the table but we all know how much posting can ruin the way a dog looks. Not to mention how frustrating it is to work with!

Angles? Many years ago, Carl Holder postulated his "white meat/red meat" theory. I was laughing at first but have come to realize over the years that there is validity to what he says! As those muscles/tendons change, grow, harden.....they change and they can actually shorten or lengthen which can cause the bones they are attached to, to also change their angles. I have a dog here who is the perfect example of that. Out of a litter of 5, he was the third pick puppy. He was placed there because #1 and #2 had better fronts/shoulder angles etc. He was scheduled to go to a pet home but that person changed their mind so he stayed here because of a lack of pet homes looking for a male pet puppy at that time. As he matured, my eye kept being drawn to him. I decided that he wasn't going anywhere, so here he remains. As it turned out, neither #1 nor #2 puppy's front ended up being as nice as #3's. I love his front today. Pretty, free moving, nice "wrap", nice keel and ribbing and nice head. I really don't care for his rear but it's not dreadful. I consider him to be the best in the litter now and am ever so glad that he stayed here. He finished his CH readily and has stormed through novice and open agility. Here's the sad part. Every single person who evaluated the litter for me, placed the puppies in pretty much the same order, but no one placed #3 as pick. I'd say the people who evaluated the litter for me were concentrating on fronts and since these changed as time went on, it leaves me with the same quandary. Picking puppies is a crap shoot!!!!

I find that Dachshunds tend to change even once they are out of the puppy stage. I've had one year old dogs who looked different 6 months later. Heads, especially, I find can make subtle changes at a later date. Nothing drastic but subtle.

Toplines? Sigh. Impossible. The puppy with a roach or a dip or a whatever may or may not change and I've not found an answer as to know which one will and which won't. If puppy is high in the rear due to long hocks, short in stifle, I think that's "probably" there for life butnot always.....sometimes things shift and "settle". But still, as a general rule, I'd stay away from long hocks and short stifles.

Keel and ribbing. I've heard several people lately tell me that their puppy has short keel and ribbing but that it'll get better. I've never known of nor seen a puppy who had short keel and ribbing as a puppy end up with adequate length. I'm not saying that it's not possible but I sincerely doubt this. All of these puppies were ones bought by relatively new people.....and were told this by the breeder. None of

these dogs HAVE developed better keel and ribbing. If it's not there as a puppy, as the puppy's body length lengthens, I don't think it's going to get better.

It's difficult to choose, that's for sure but I think we have to make our choices and then learn to live with them, or place the puppies and move on. It's not fair to a litter of puppies to remain a litter rather than going out to be individual dogs on their own. It will be far harder for older puppies never separated from their pack mates to learn to think independently and be without their litter mates. Even keeping two out of the same litter should be approached with an eye to making sure that they have plenty of time as an individual, rather than a pack member with just the litter mate. Sending one puppy off to a friend's house for a two week "sleepover" can go a long way towards breaking that pack mentality between the two. And we all know that it's much harder to place older puppies than it is when they're just babies. Even though a 6 month old puppy is still PLENTY puppy for me, the pet buying public wants them younger. To keep them TOO long may just preclude a great home being available for them. There are plenty of people who will take older puppies but if too many puppies are kept, it's going to be impossibly hard to properly teach and socialize the puppies so that they can reach their full potential. As a breeder, it is my duty to do the best for each puppy I have been responsible for. That includes placing the puppy at an appropriate age in a good pet home if I don't think it's going to be a show prospect. I may later weep over my decision but a happy, safe puppy in a great pet home, regardless of it's quality is still a success for me.

Going "out" to pick a puppy sometimes is actually easier because I find that my heart isn't involved. I would pick that puppy, also by watching it on the trot. I like to look at them at 12 weeks. After that, they go through an awfully gangly state. I'm not sure if Standards follow this "rule" or not or if their timing is different but I try not to look at puppies after they are 12 weeks old because it usually makes me unhappy. <GGG> At somewhere between 6-10 months of age, it starts coming all together. Hopefully.

Good luck with your puppy choice! Have fun and enjoy

Wendy McQuiston
wendym2@aircanopy.net
www.ginghamdog.biz
www.dfwdachshund.com