

Do you want a hopeful show specimen or a first class pet /companion?

In Otterhounds these are both the same; it is simply not possible to guarantee puppy will win at shows, so the most important thing is to choose your pet/companion and if it grows into a show beauty you have the icing on the cake. All the time and experience in the world can overlook a puppy that comes on to be a show winner. The Breed Standard drawn up by a group of experts in the field and show circles, sets out the points of our breed.

First find your litter by contacting the Kennel Club, or the Otterhound Club Secretary, who will be able to put you in touch with breeders who actually have puppies available, or you can go to see and talk about the breed until there are puppies. You will almost certainly have to wait, Otterhound breeders still only breed a few litters each year and most breeders have a waiting list, but this will give you time to look, listen and make absolutely sure that you really want an Otterhound. Do see as many adults and puppies as possible.

A choice once made should be for life.

The integrity of the breeder is essential, so be sure to find one with a deep interest in the breed, prepared to give you plenty of their time to help you make the right decision. Breeders who register puppies are covered by the Kennel Club Code of Ethics and all breeders who are members of the Otterhound Club are, in addition, covered by the Club Code of Ethics (Copies of these can be obtained from the Kennel Club and the Otterhound Club Secretary).

Take the whole family to meet and get to know the breed. A good breeder will welcome you (by appointment) and both you and the breeder can see how you all take to the hounds. Should this be your first "meeting" with an Otterhound, their size and strength can come as a surprise. Their temperament should be 'laid back' and pleased, though sometimes a little reserved about meeting you.

When you have decided that it has to be an Otterhound as your family companion (or show hound), you should decide whether you want a dog or bitch; I believe this is an entirely personal choice. See the puppies with their dam. Also see the sire, if possible. Make sure that they, and any other hounds, look healthy. I would advise you not to choose the boldest, bossiest puppy of either sex, but also be sure not to choose a puppy that is nervous. A 'happy to meet you, middle of the pack' puppy will make the best friend and has already learned to respect the pack leader in his/her litter.

For general guidance, colour will generally change and go lighter. A fine headed puppy will stay fine, but the smallest pup can grow to be the best or the biggest. Although the liveliest puppy can settle, most litters do form a 'top dog' and pecking order. Bearing in mind the points raised, choose a puppy you like and don't be put off easily, although the breeder's guidance on structure and breed characteristics should be borne in mind. I say this because there is no positive or sure way to choose, and should you be disappointed later, it is better for you to know you chose your puppy. It is often better to wait than accept a puppy than accept a puppy merely because it is available.

Good Breeders will supply you with a copy of the Breed Health Survey carried out by the Otterhound Club and inform you of any heritable problems within the breed.

These include:

Bone structure growth problems at the hips and elbows: Ask to see the Sire and Dam's Hip and Elbow KC/BVA Score Sheet.

Epilepsy: Discuss the Fitting Status of the Sire, Dam, Grandsire, Grandam and their litter brothers and sisters with the breeder.

Cebaceous Cysts.

Good Breeders will also supply you with the following when you collect your choice:

1. KC Registration Papers (and possibly Tattoo Registration Certificate) for you to make your transfer of ownership.
2. A Signed Four or Five Generation Pedigree.
3. A Receipt.
4. A Record of the Worming Regime.
5. Insurance Cover for the First Six Weeks.
6. A Diet Sheet showing the puppy's Feeding Regime and a Starter Pack of food that the puppy has been eating.

If you wish to change the type of food, do so very slowly so as not to upset your puppy's stomach. Many puppies immediately play up over food, deciding not to eat once the competitive element of the rest of the litter has gone. However, your puppy will not starve itself, so just take the dish up after about five minutes and try again at the next meal time. Do keep persevering with this for 48 hours before contacting the breeder. They will always be glad to hear all about your life with your puppy and, very importantly, help with any problems that arise, so they can be put into proportion straight away.

Your breeder will also have explained the breed's health history and possible problems, and should ask you to confirm your understanding in writing. This also forms a Contract of Sale for the puppy.

Insoluble difficulties occasionally arise, despite the most careful planning, and good breeders will always have their stock back.

Take your puppy to your vet for a check up, breeders will welcome his input and he gets to meet your puppy before he starts sticking needles in him/her! Before your puppy is fully inoculated do not put it down outside your home and garden. The final inoculation is at 12 weeks so the puppy can go out at 14 weeks. However, as soon as feasible, do take your puppy out to see and experience places and people as much as possible without putting it down.

Your vet will advise you on future worming and this is particularly important if you have young children in

your family. New puppies should be given a bed and space of their own so that they can sleep and continue to grow healthy away from the busy household.

We want you to enjoy your new puppy.

Otterhounds are really brilliant people to live with, so please be sure you want your puppy for Christmas, through its adolescence, from 1 year old to 2 years when it is still a naughty baby but big and strong with it, then through all the joys of the rest of its life.