

## Meeting The Breeder

Buying a Malamute from a good breeder is not unlike adopting a child. He will ask questions about your family, your lifestyle, and the type of life your dog will have. He may use a questionnaire, or a telephone interview. He may insist on meeting you before agreeing to sell you a pup. This can seem intrusive and time-consuming, but this person is acting in your best interest. This breeder will give you and your pup lots of support, board your pet in an emergency, and, if the impossible happens and you are unable to keep your pet, welcome him back with open arms. He will encourage your questions, and answer all of them. He will be proud to invite you to his kennel to meet his dogs. Watch him with his dogs— you will see lots of love and affection.



Responsible breeders are also good owners, and enjoy their dogs' companionship. Malamute breeders can share many activities with their dogs: dog shows, obedience trials, sledding, weight pulling, backpacking, hiking, agility, ski-joring... the list is endless. A word of warning about dog show records: there are great dogs with great records, bad dogs with great records, and great dogs who have never been shown. There are more important indicators of a dog's integrity and soundness than a show record.

Avoid any breeder who seems too eager — or desperate — to sell a dog to you, is reluctant to let you meet all of his dogs, does not use a written sales agreement, or is unable to back up his claims with original documentation. You may luck out and get a good dog from such a breeder, but if you run into any problems (and the risk is higher than average), it is unlikely that you will get any help from such a person.

## Meeting The Dogs

First, you've checked out the breeder and his paperwork, spoken with other puppy buyers, and it's all in order. Now it's time to take a close, objective look at his dogs.

### Food and Shelter

Look at their housing. Malamutes need clean, roomy kennels; many have access to a large, fenced exercise yard. Sturdy houses provide shelter from wind and rain, and a dry place to sleep. At least during winter, houses contain some sort of bedding, often pine shavings. Young healthy Malamutes don't often need insulated houses, although older dogs do and will appreciate them.

All dogs should have access to clean water. During winter, some kennels may use heated watering systems, but most simply give their dogs water two or three times during the day. Dog food should be top quality. Most breeders use one of the many excellent commercial foods available; a few make home-cooked meals. Either is acceptable— feeding one of the bargain-basement brands is not.

## Appearance and Behaviour

Observe the dogs objectively. We know they're all gorgeous.... *But— do they appear healthy?* Coats should be tidy and free of mats, even while blowing coat (the massive shed of undercoat which occurs each spring). Toenails should be short and well-trimmed. Ears, eyes and skin should be free of discharge or signs of infection. Breeding stock, in particular, should be in impeccably good health.

Your puppy's parents should be at least 18 months old, for hip certification and to help ensure sufficient maturity. In fact, it is common for bitches to be two to three years old when they have their first litter. Ask!

All dogs who are part of the breeding program should be introduced to you, probably one or two at a time. You will witness different personalities— some may be very exuberant, others may show more dignity and restraint, and some laid-back souls will roll over for a good belly-rub. Whatever the differences, all dogs should exhibit sound temperaments, with no evidence of aggressive behaviour towards people. Mals are friendly dogs who enjoy human company— *walk away from anyone who tries to tell you otherwise.* They do not, however, always get along with their own kind.

Malamutes are canine athletes. Whatever form of exercise they enjoy, they should all display a reasonable level of fitness. Sure, the older dogs may be a bit slower than the young guys, but stay away from any breeder whose dogs appear generally out of shape.

Any failing in these areas can be an indication that the dogs do not receive good basic care. Think twice about buying a puppy raised in such an environment.

### Interaction

Observe the breeder's relationship with his dogs. Mals are notorious for paying more attention to visitors than to the person they depend on for love, food and care, but once they've greeted you, they should have a bit left over for their human. Be suspicious of a breeder if his dogs seem to fear or avoid him, or if he is unable to handle or control them.

If there are pups at the kennel during your visit, look at them with the same objective eyes you use for the adults. This is really hard, because they're so darned cute, but try! Again, they should appear healthy, with coats, skin, eyes and ears all in good shape. Different personalities will be evident— learn to do some basic temperament tests to help sort out the pups. Also learn what level of development and type of behaviour to expect at various ages. There are many books which will help you prepare for your visit and for a puppy — "Before & After Getting Your Puppy" by Dr. Ian Dunbar is excellent.

## After Sales Service!

*Service?* Sounds like buying a car, right? Well, a good breeder will want to provide good service, for the life of your Malamute.

He will provide a complete package of information about your pup's basic needs, along with advice about training and activities. He will want to see your dog as it matures, so he can evaluate his breeding program. He will be available to answer all of your questions, and if he doesn't know the answer he will find someone who does. He will be there to help in the unhappy event that your pup develops an unforeseen problem, and will provide any compensation which may have been specified in your sales agreement.

Now you know what to look for in a Malamute breeder. We know that it seems like a lot, but Mals are worth it! Visit as many kennels as you can, spend lots of time talking with the breeders and meeting their dogs and talk with past puppy buyers! Take your time and make a careful, informed decision.

*As we said, Mals are worth it!*

*Puppies are for a lifetime!*



## About Malamute Rescue...

The Alaskan Malamute HELP League came into being when responsible Malamute breeders and concerned owners got involved in finding homes for pets when owners were no longer able to care for their dogs. In addition to rescue, assessment and placement of adoptable dogs, the HELP League also provides education and information for Malamute owners and runs a permanent foster-dog program for dogs which cannot be placed. For more information about Malamute rescue, contact:

**Alaskan Malamute HELP League**  
**info@malamuterescue.com**  
*or visit our web site at:*  
**www.malamuterescue.com**



# Choosing the Right Breeder

*Some Points To Consider In The Careful Selection Of Your New Pet...*

## Where Will You Buy A Puppy?

So you've determined that you can give a puppy a good home and lots of love. Where do you find the right puppy? Let's start by examining where not to go.

You've likely heard of puppy mills—places where dogs are neglected, possibly abused, and where bitches are bred repeatedly with no concern for their or their pups' welfare. Puppy mills are not defined by the numbers and variety of breeds kept, but rather by the breeder's attitudes: a puppy mill can have over 100 dogs of a huge variety of breeds, or only one or two dogs representing one breed. If you arrive at a kennel and find it to be a puppy mill, leave immediately. There are many stories of people who bought a puppy because they couldn't bear to leave it in such an inhospitable place, only to lose a sickly dog after massive vet bills and a lot of grief. Does your money keep them in business? Yes!

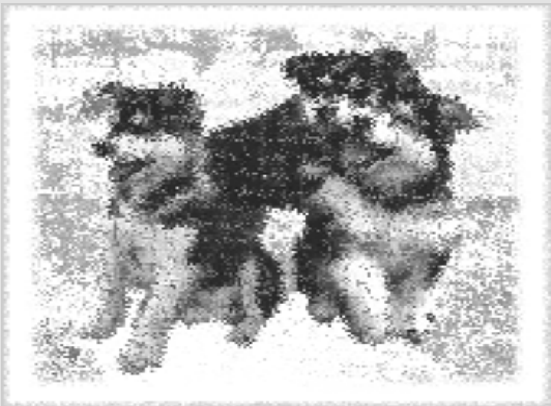
Consider, also, the issue of whether or not the public should support such a breeder—the more pups these puppy mills sell, the more they will continue to produce. Only informed consumers, who refuse to buy from these people, have the power to put them out of business.

Many puppy mills sell their puppies, through brokers, to pet stores. The **only** time you should consider purchasing a puppy from a pet store is when the store is affiliated exclusively with a recognized animal shelter for adoption of homeless pets. Many pet stores will turn a blind eye—you don't have to!

Often puppies are advertised by individuals or families who have bred their family pet. While these people may love their pet very much, they are unlikely to have considered the long-term health of your prospective puppy in their decision.

Health and temperament problems can afflict any dog, but are more often found in dogs purchased from the above sources.

An **ethical breeder** should be able to produce verifiable documents about the soundness and health of their dogs, and written guarantees for the offspring. They should also be happy to show you sound and healthy "parent" dogs (at least mom; dad may live elsewhere and be introduced via pictures and/or video). A good breeder will answer all your questions and be as concerned about your pet's welfare as you are.



## How Do We Choose A Good Breeder?

### The Legal Stuff

The dog-breeding business is largely unregulated. However, anyone selling purebred dogs in Canada must abide by the Animal Pedigree Act and the bylaws of the Canadian Kennel Club (CKC), which state that all dogs represented as purebred must be registered or registerable with the CKC, registration papers must be included in the purchase price, and dogs must be identified (either by tattoo or microchip) before leaving the breeder's premises. You would usually be shown a copy of the pup's litter registration certificate at the time of sale; his individual registration certificate must be sent to you within six months. So, remember: *any breeder advertising "unregistered purebreds" or charging a higher price for registered pups than for their unregistered littermates is breaking the law.*

### Where's The Proof?

Purebred dogs come with lots of paperwork: registration certificates; health clearances; championship, obedience and/or working certificates. Breeders should be eager to show you original documents to support their claims about their dogs. Often, stud dogs from another kennel are used; copies of their certificates are acceptable.

### Health Clearances:

Purebred dogs are affected by inherited diseases, many of which can be easily detected in breeding stock. All Malamute moms and dads should possess at least the following minimum clearances:

**Hip Dysplasia:** A potentially crippling deformity of the hip joint. Dogs may be certified by the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) at 18 months of age, or by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) at two years. Some breeders are also working with a new method called Penn-Hip. Watch out for breeders who obtain preliminary diagnoses for animals too young to certify, and then breed them. *"Prelims" are not certification— a satisfactory result on a youngster does not ensure clearance at 18 or 24 months.* If it did, clearances would be available at the earlier ages!

**Hereditary Eye Disease:** Many eye disorders occur in Malamutes; the most common is cataract. Dogs may be certified clear of hereditary eye disease at any age, following examination by a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist. Certificates are issued by the Canine Eye Registry Foundation (CERF) and are valid for one year from the date of examination.

**Chondrodysplasia:** This disease is caused by a simple recessive gene, inherited from both parents. Affected dogs are small and have malformed bones in their front legs. Clearance certificates, based on pedigree analysis, are issued by the Alaskan Malamute Club of America, at any age.

These clearances are all easy and inexpensive to obtain. Any vet can x-ray hips for certification by OVC or OFA, at a cost

of \$100 to \$200. Veterinary ophthalmologists work in most major centres and conduct regular clinics in other regions and at dog shows. The cost is about \$30 annually. Chondrodysplasia certification costs less than \$10.

Hypothyroidism is also a problem in Malamutes, and you should seek assurance that breeding stock is not being treated for this disorder.

### Your Pup's Preventive Veterinary Care:

Obviously, you want your pup to be in tip-top shape when he joins your family. Ask to see proof that he has received basic preventive care.

**Worming:** All puppies are routinely treated for roundworms. Ask to see a record of the worming agent and the dates it was administered, along with a negative result from a stool test done following worming.

**Vaccinations:** At purchase, your pup's vaccinations should be up-to-date for his age. There are a few different vaccination schedules, all of which are acceptable. The most common one sees pups getting their first vaccination at seven or eight weeks (*and pups should never leave mom prior to seven weeks*). Boosters are given at 12 and 16 weeks, along with a rabies shot at 16 weeks. As well, most vets recommend a booster against parvovirus at 20 weeks. Except for the rabies shot, which must be administered by a vet, some breeders administer their own vaccines. Ask to see the receipt, and write down the name and lot number of the vaccine. Make sure that vaccines are properly refrigerated—incorrectly stored vaccine becomes ineffective. If your pup was vaccinated by a veterinarian, you will receive a signed certificate. New vaccine protocols for adult dogs are always being developed, and you should consult with your vet to choose the best protocol for your pet.

**Heartworm:** Pups born during heartworm season (mosquito season) can be started on preventive medication prior to leaving the kennel. Find out what your pup was given, and when the next dose is due.

### Veterinarians' Health Certificates:

A good breeder will **not** ask you to take his word that his pups are healthy. He will prove it with a signed statement from his vet that the pups were examined (ideally, just a few days prior to sale) and found to be in good health.



## About Sales Agreements

Written sales agreements outline the breeder's and the buyer's responsibilities. Terms will vary from one kennel to the next. Be sure you understand and are comfortable with the terms of any agreement you sign, and that you believe the breeder will honour any commitments he or she makes.

- **Responsible breeders** encourage you to have your new pup examined by your vet within 48 hours of the sale, and will allow you to return the pup for a full refund (or replacement if available), if your vet finds a previously undiagnosed hereditary or communicable disorder.
- **Some compensation** should be offered in the event that the pup develops specified hereditary disorders (e.g. hip dysplasia). There may be limitations on this coverage—be sure that they are reasonable.
- **Responsible and Committed breeders** will include a clause requiring you to return the dog to them if you ever find yourself unable to keep it.
- **Some agreements include** requirements about housing, feed, training and/or veterinary care for your Malamute.
- **Pups sold as companions** are usually subject to a Canadian Kennel Club Non-Breeding Agreement, a legal document which prohibits you from breeding your pet. As well, the sales agreement may specify an age by which you must spay or neuter your pet.

Most pups are sold as family companions. It is reasonable to ask for a list of previous puppy buyers who would be willing to speak with you. This will give you an idea of the extent to which you can expect to receive instruction, support and advice from the breeders on your list before making a decision. This is particularly important if you are purchasing a Malamute for the first time!

A sales agreement is not a guarantee that nothing will ever go wrong with your pup. It is impossible to predict with absolute certainty that every pup from every litter will be healthy and sound. A sales agreement is your assurance that the breeder will stand behind his or her dogs and offer you some compensation if your pup develops a specified disorder. Generally, compensation will be a replacement puppy, or a refund not exceeding the original purchase price.