

Breeding Questions

Interview with Richard Beauchamp (Puppies)

D.F. – I suppose the first question everyone asks is: "Where to start?" What's the best way to get started in dog breeding?

R.B. – With a puppy, I suppose. I would advise buying your first puppy only after you've been observing the breed for two or three years. Not acquiring, but just observing, reading, and listening, especially listening. In the first year or two, newcomers should keep their mouths shut and just listen. The guy who gets one or two titles or finishes his first champion thinks he knows everything. But the truth is, there are few people who understand less than this "expert," whom you sometimes wish you could lock in the bathroom to keep him quiet!

D.F. – But if you can't wait, how do you choose your first puppy?

R.B. – As I said, a lot should precede getting a puppy. First, you should gain knowledge about the breed and understand its standard. You need to know what the breed should look like and, even better, know what you plan to do with the stock you eventually acquire. To learn this, you need to spend a lot of time and learn a lot. You'll be lucky if the litter from which you get a puppy has a good sire and dam, well-selected, but at the very beginning, you won't know that. It would be great if acquiring your first puppy is preceded by several years, and then a few more years pass before you decide to have your first litter!

D.F. – That requires a lot of self-control.

R.B. – Usually, people buy a bitch, breed her a year or two later, and off they go! Whatever is born in the litter – good, bad, or indifferent – are their future show and breeding dogs. I believe that in the first few years after the first purchase, a person should learn, show the dog, participate in national shows, compare, travel around the country, visit kennels, communicate with top breeders, and then, after all this, get the best bitch available at that moment. Maybe they'll get a good brood bitch from properly structured breeding. Then and only then should a novice breeder have their first litter.

D.F. – Where do the best puppies come from?

R.B. – The best puppies, I believe, are those raised in someone's kitchen. They have strong temperaments, get used to door slamming, noise, and people running around. It's especially great if there are kids in the house, as children around the puppy pen greatly contribute to the puppies' socialization. From the very beginning, puppies should get used to being handled, hearing voices, feeling people's presence, and learning to be social animals.

Newborn puppies up to 4-5 weeks look like rats. I never believe phrases like: "I spotted him from birth." Puppies after birth are compressed and formless, their muzzles flattened, etc. I remember we once bred our Bichon Mr. Beau Monde. A while later, the bitch's owner called me in ecstasy: "We have a litter of 3 group winners and 2 Best in Show at least!" I asked how old the puppies were, and he said 4 or 5 weeks. I never know if I have a Best in Show winner until the dog wins.

The biggest mistake when choosing a puppy is selecting it on the table.

D.F. – You mean in a stacked position?

R.B. – Yes. People stack the puppy the way they like instead of watching how it naturally moves. The best puppy is not the one with good conformation but the one that knows how to use it.

I think the puppy that stands out in the litter with style, elegance, and posture will ultimately be the best in the litter.

D.F. – It's like they choose themselves?

R.B. – It never fails. Posture doesn't go away, and elegance certainly doesn't either. If you've studied the standard and observed, you've formed an image in your mind. When a puppy catches your eye and says with its entire being: "I am the perfect schnauzer" – that's what you need, despite not having the twenty million things mentioned in the standard.

In most breeds, I would first like to see puppies at 8 weeks old. At this age, they give a picture of how they'll look as adults, a miniature adult dog.

Later, these proportions get disturbed during growth. Puppies of some breeds become very gangly and long-legged or stretch in length. At 8 weeks, I pay attention to things that worry me, things a potential show puppy shouldn't have – a lack of head, a lack of legs, a poor tail set, a bad bite. But I'm not quick to make a judgment on the puppy's quality; the bite or any other feature may change. I can wait and see if the fault corrects itself.

D.F. – And after 8 weeks?

R.B. – I'd like to look at the puppy a month later to see how it's developing. For example, I liked the puppy at 8 weeks, but it seemed to have short legs, and at 3 months they became even shorter. I'd say the puppy is developing in the wrong direction. But the same puppy might gain leg length. Then it's not a problem, and it develops in a better way.

I think at 3 months you can start assessing the neck and shoulders. You can determine a straight shoulder and the correctness of the neck set. You can talk about crooked legs and how the puppy moves. You can see if the movements are good and if the rear angles are satisfactory. At this age, you can also evaluate posture. Coat concerns me the least. Some may have better texture than others, but it's the last thing I focus on. Few dogs are born lacking coat. Eventually, most will have sufficient coverage. Sooner or later, it comes.

At 8 weeks, you can tell a lot about the head: the set, proportions, eye shape and size, and other aspects. However, in some lines, puppies develop slower, especially males. The head forms the slowest, but the body also lags in development.

D.F. – Do you have personal preferences – male or female?

R.B. – Females in most breeds embody the essence of the type. Of course, we need males for the next generations, but when choosing a stud dog to use in breeding, I prefer one that comes from a great female line. I think this is crucial for any breed. That's the stud I want; he'll always give me the best puppies with my own strong family line, and I feel the chances of a successful litter increase.

D.F. – After the second evaluation, when do you reassess the puppies' potential?

R.B. – After seeing that the puppy moves correctly, has type, balance, etc., I don't look at it for a while. At 3 months, I may give away some puppies that I like less. They may turn out beautiful, but I doubt it. If there are 2-3 puppies that seem promising, I don't look at them until they are 6-7 months old. At this time, males may become awkward and gangly, while females may look quite decent. They all, males and females, go through the "ugly duckling" stage from 3 to 9 months, but especially males.

At 7 months, I re-examine the puppies, not to see how pretty they are, but focusing on balance, posture, and firmness. Puppies lacking these qualities will never acquire them.

D.F. – Do you pay much attention to puppy classes at shows?

R.B. – I love attending or judging specialty shows, especially puppy classes. I want to see how they look in the ring. As a spectator, I don't approach them closely; I don't need to. I want to see the overall picture. Sometimes I see puppies just turning 6 months old with such remarkable potential that it seems they are our great future; you just have to wait a bit. But I also look at the last ones in the ring. Most judges try to choose the most developed, precocious, fast-growing charming puppy with a magnificent head and coat at this age. These puppies usually win only until they are one and a half years old, and after that, they become overdeveloped or "fall apart." I like a puppy that is a bit "unfinished," refined, not ready to be shown off, but with fundamental qualities like elegance.

D.F. – Looking through old catalogs, I noticed that the winning puppies disappear, while those that only placed in the standings grow up to become winners.

R.B. – I took a photo of my puppy Mr. Beau Monde at 5 months old; he was unfinished but had everything in place, all the "pieces." But then he stood last in the ring among puppies ready to win, while he looked very plain. When this puppy grew up, he became one of the best males of his time. So I don't need a dog fully formed at 6-7 months; I need something young and still developing, with a long way to victory ahead. Can you imagine a 10-year-old boy looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger? Or an 8-year-old girl built like a top model? If a puppy has an adult dog's skull at 6 months, imagine how it will look at one and a half years old? Often, less is better!

D.F. – Many judges won't choose a puppy as Best of Breed, no matter how good it is.

R.B. – Absolute nonsense! And then they apologize with words: "Well, you lost to maturity." This drives me crazy. Any trash will age someday. Maturity is not synonymous with quality. It's better to encourage a promising puppy than a useless maturity that has always been useless. You know, there's always been and always will be a boom in adult dogs.

The American Spaniel Club holds a puppy sweepstakes every year, attracting the best puppies from across the country. Historically

, puppies that grew up to be great in their breed didn't win much at these events. They might have placed, but they were never impressive enough to win.

In the Bichon breed, males show their best potential around 3 years old. They mature and are ready to win. They mature much slower than many other breeds of the same size. In puppies, an underdeveloped head, too narrow or too refined, can develop terribly. As the head widens, the eyes can become round and slightly set. A muzzle that seems a bit long may become more proportionate if the skull widens. But ugliness is ugliness. It rarely becomes beautiful.

D.F. – What about back length?

R.B. – A puppy with a long back will never become short. Some things don't change. At three months, you can assess movements. The front can improve significantly. If the chest isn't deep enough, the front legs will be wobbly in front movement. As the chest deepens, the front becomes stronger, and the front leg movements improve. Shoulders won't change much. If they are straight in a puppy, they will always remain straight and will never lie as we'd like. Straight rears won't change much either.

Eye color changes; the older the dog gets, the lighter the eyes become. If the dog has light eyes initially, they will become yellow over time. Even the darkest eyes will lighten with age, so pay attention to this.

D.F. – Suppose your puppy happily passes all these stages. Do you think it should be constantly taken to shows to get used to them?

R.B. – Of course. The youngest should attend shows while the adults are being shown and should see how it happens from a young age, what attention is given to adult dogs, see strange breeds and strange people. This is the best socialization in the world. At other times, young dogs should be at home in the yard, running with children and staying puppies. Early excessive training for puppies is harmful. Turning the ring into hard work, walking around the ring for a long time, practicing perfect show stacks can be fatal. Let puppies have fun. Repetition will teach them the procedure. Too much demand will kill their spirit.

D.F. – Too much discipline?

R.B. – They need to learn to be relaxed; in many cases, you can maintain this throughout their show career. Dogs of many breeds lose this quality as their show career progresses.

D.F. – Why?

R.B. – They get bored. At first shows, they think it's great, and then they enter a stage of deterioration. I think it's very important how they were raised. Some breeds can't handle excessive training. They pick up everything required very quickly. Running back and forth, on a triangle and a circle, stacking... After 5-6 shows, they get bored. Then boredom takes over.

D.F. – Can you tell from a puppy: "I don't think this temperament will improve"?

R.B. – Maybe you can train a dog well enough to become a champion. But it's hopeless to expect anything beyond that. Some breeds can be taught to become good show dogs; others can't.

Pat Craig has a wonderful method with her puppies. She often gives two best puppies to one owner, and they raise them until they are a year old. The puppies grow up in a family environment, and then Pat takes one of them back. Of course, these puppies have excellent temperaments, are well-socialized, and in exchange for raising these puppies, the family gets a good show dog.

D.F. – You and she can give away a really good show dog to get a better one!

R.B. – In some breeds, puppies raised in kennels never become good show dogs. Never, without exceptions! A dog raised in a home is socialized, and you can give it to any handler to show. With a kennel-raised dog, the situation is different. In these breeds, puppies raised in kennels won't succeed. They may be wonderful in the kennel, but only in the kennel.

D.F. – Yes, they love it!

R.B. – They interact with other dogs and are surrounded by them. Puppies raised in a home interact with people. When you show a dog, it needs to interact with you, focus on you, not on some dog that might be left at home.

D.F. – To sum up, it turns out you prefer female puppies to males.

R.B. – There's no point in keeping a male unless he is outstanding. If a female has a slight fault, you take her to a suitable male.

The biggest fault in today's dogs is mediocrity. Females that are pretty good are bred to a male who is also pretty good and happens to be nearby. Maybe this male is distantly related to great dogs, but those great dogs are different; it's not the same as their relative living next door. Most people breed what they have and keep what they get. And what they get is mediocrity.

D.F. – So you think this is the main problem in dog breeding today?

R.B. – It seems so. Large breeding kennels are disappearing. Our dogs move into homes and become family members. Can you imagine saying: "My daughter's child is a freak, and it should be sent away?"

D.F. – Are you saying that dogs shouldn't be family pets?

R.B. – I don't mean that at all. But dogs, no matter how much we love them, are not people. "Beautiful because it's ours" works for our children and relatives, but not for animals. Your beloved Pupsy might not produce anything worthwhile. Know this. Her litter might not be the litter of the year, and none of the puppies might become dog of the year, no matter how much you hope. Don't waste time, effort, and expectations on mediocrity.