

## **Pet Evaluation Testing**

*A new way to find the right home for pet-quality puppies.*

By Carol Lea Benjamin

Breeders have their own ways of evaluating puppies with show potential; "show guesses," a breeder friend calls them. For until their adult teeth come in, until their ears go up or tip or do whatever the standard says they should, until you can check the adult coming and going and see about all the other worrisome things that determine whether or not a dog is championship material, what can you do but guess? But what about the other puppies, the majority of puppies, I am told, who go not *to show homes, but to pet homes*? How can breeders make sure these special dogs are going to appropriate homes?

I've devised a very easy test which displays each puppy's character in minutes. The Pet Evaluation Test is described in detail in my new book *The Chosen Puppy: How to Select and Raise a Great Puppy from a Shelter*. The test not only helps people select appropriate puppies from shelters, puppies for whom genetic information is rarely available, but it also is illuminating for pure-bred dogs. Using this test, potential owners are able to judge activity level dominance, trainability, people centeredness and how aloof or affectionate a given puppy may be. These factors differ from dog to dog. The particular Basenji, Boxer or Smooth Fox Terrier perfect for me could be all wrong for you.

### **Let the Buyer be Aware**

The acronym PET is no accident. The purpose of the test is to evaluate a pup's potential as a pet. During the test, each puppy displays his character *to the very person whose pet he might become*. That in itself makes it a very different kind of test. It's different, too, because each step is meant to be repeated four or five times during each test; because even after many repetitions the test is valid, even helpful, to each pup tested; because you can administer the test as early as seven or eight weeks and up to several months of age; and again, most important, different because it is the potential buyer who performs the test.

The pet evaluation test includes no action that would not normally occur to a puppy during his first few days or weeks at a new home:

- observing the puppy in an area new to him
- trying to get the puppy to follow a person
- calling the puppy to come
- petting the puppy without restraining him
- gently teaching the puppy to sit

In addition, one is asked while working with each puppy to note activity level and dominance, and descriptions are given for low, medium and high ratings in each. It's a test a child can perform, and should perform if the puppy will become part of his family.

### **Testing--1, 2, 3**

How, then, is the pup's potential as a pet evaluated? Simple. If, given a bit of time, the puppy responds well to a new environment, this is how he will adjust to his new home and eventually, with a continuing program of socialization, to the larger world away from home. Second, if the puppy will follow someone (a leader), he is demonstrating not only social attraction, but the willingness to be led, i.e., trained. The puppy who won't follow or who runs ahead or gets underfoot is more dominant than the puppy who follows nicely. The puppy who ignores the tester may be highly independent or not a people-centered dog. Unless this is the norm for your breed and your buyers know this, this pup would be a poor choice for most pet owners.

Next the potential buyer can call the puppy to come. He is not limited to doing this once. A puppy in a new environment, like a puppy exploring his new home, may feel distracted, timid, inattentive. If he comes the second or third time he's called, fine. You can see the direction he is headed and it's a good one. Furthermore, now the tester can note if the pup comes close or right up onto him. The dog who never comes at all, even given four or five tries, won't make a satisfying pet for the majority of owners. The puppy who runs people down, especially if he then gets very mouthy, is a dominant dog, certainly not the pet for young children or a first-time

owner. The puppy who comes when called and allows himself to be petted, possibly licking the hand that pets him but not biting it, will make a reasonable pet for children or adults. In either case, the next step--petting--will show potential owners how the dog accepts and delivers affection. And you will be right there to elaborate on what is considered ideal behavior for your breed.

Now the tester can stand up and, attracting the puppy to look up by jingling keys or squeaking a squeak toy, he can gently try teaching the puppy to sit. If the puppy is a quick study, he will be sitting by the third or fourth try. What greater incentive to new owners for gentle training! Here they will see on the spot how trainable--or how difficult--a puppy might be. Moreover, each step of the way they are seeing how the puppy reacts to and for *them*, not for someone else, someone, perhaps, more experienced or more "alpha."

Each time the test is performed, the puppy will do better at it. No problem. By being tested by different potential owners, he is being socialized and trained. He is learning important life lessons: people are fun and not to be feared; when someone calls you sweetly, run to them; sit when you are told and someone will pet you. Can this harm any puppy? Hardly!

No gratuitous dominance such as holding a puppy on its back or letting it dangle in the air appears in pet evaluation testing. There is no attempt to startle a pup with loud noise or pinch its toes to test its touch sensitivity. None of this is necessary in order to see what kind of a pet a puppy will make. But, more important, to treat a young puppy thus must give it an awful impression of the human race. Puppies and dogs accept corrections that are part of the natural flow of education--a harsh look from a mother who has been offended by brash behavior, a slam with her foreleg for going out of bounds, then, later on, a look, a warning, a leash correction from a human alpha teaching the puppy some basics. But to be manhandled for nothing can make a young, impressionable puppy grow up to distrust the species that indulges in such practices. When handling very young dogs, one should always stop and think about how the puppies will perceive the world based on your actions.

### **The Perfect Match**

Pet puppies should be placed as carefully as when you place each of the feet while stacking your latest show puppy. Once it is ascertained that a Westie or a Chihuahua or what have you is indeed the perfect breed for a given family, the next job is to find the perfect puppy for them; one that bonds easily, works enthusiastically, follows, kisses, wags for *them*; one with the right level of dominance, one not too sedate and not too active, always for them. Even within a litter, puppies' characters can vary significantly.

For pet dogs, one more aid in appropriate selection can mean a better chance at living happily ever after. And after all, isn't that what every breeder wants for all her puppies?

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