



What to Ask A Breeder

Not all breeders are created equal and neither are the puppies they produce. By definition, anyone who owns a female dog at the time it gives birth is a "breeder." It is not always easy to tell the difference between a responsible hobby breeder and an unknowledgeable "backyard breeder" or a commercial "puppy mill" breeder.

Also, don't avoid show lines because you just want a pet and don't want a dog to show. In every litter there are pet puppies, but they come from the same gene pool. Responsible breeders will do all they can to avoid health and temperament problems by researching pedigrees and screening parents for certain inherited problems before breeding.

Things to look for as you search for your breeder:

Do you show your Havanese in AKC events?

Both the sire and the dam should be good examples of the breed. Those who actively compete in dog events tend to have an overall higher commitment to the breed. A breeder breeds for a purpose. They never breed for money or because they just "like the breed." If parents are not AKC champions, I would hesitate buying a puppy from them.

How many breeds do you have?

Ideally, someone will have a special interest in only one or two breeds. Be careful if a breeder has more than 3 breeds of dogs.

How many litters a year do you have?

A good breeder may breed one, two or three litters, or may not breed at all for a year or more between litters. More is never better. Anyone who seems to have puppies all the time is probably doing it at the expense of quality.

Are you a member of the Havanese Club of America and/or any local kennel club's?

Good breeders are active members of their local breed club and/or national breed club. If the breeder is not a member of the HCA or a local kennel club beware. Unethical breeders do not want to draw attention to themselves or be regulated in any way, and clubs have a tendency to ask too many questions. It is possible that a good breeder may be an active member of the national Havanese club and may not have the time to be a good member of any further clubs.

What are your dogs strengths/what do you like about Havanese?

A really good breeder will go on and on about their own dogs, giving examples of things that the dogs have done that illustrate a particular breed characteristic. Watch them - you can tell if a person is enthusiastic about their subject. If they're just giving a speech and don't care, you might want to consider walking away. Look for evidence of loving the breed and wanting to improve it.

What are your dog's weaknesses/what do you dislike about Havanese?

There is no correct answer – but pay close attention on how a breeder answers. Do they see faults in their own dogs? There is a phenomenon known as kennel-blindness, where people think their dogs are perfect (or have

only minor faults) and dogs owned by others have all sorts of faults. Ask them about someone else's dogs and see how they respond!

How long have you been involved with Havanese?

Beware of someone who has jumped on the bandwagon to make a fast buck. They may not have the best interests of the breed nor buyer in mind. A breeder should be familiar with the historical origins of the Havanese. They should be able to educate you about genetic predispositions to health problems, temperament of the breed and general day to day care of the breed.

What health testing has been performed on both parents?

Assessing the health testing of the puppy's parents is probably the easiest way to avoid a "backyard" breeder. The MINIMUM requirements of the Havanese Club of America are that both dam and sire be OFA-certified free of hip dysplasia, OFA-certified for their patella, OFA-certified free from deafness, and annually CERF-certified free from genetic eye diseases each year. Many breeders also do cardiac, thyroid, LCP and elbow testing. Always verify the results of health tests. Don't take their word for it

Can I see a copy of the health test results?

A good breeder will be glad to offer the requested information. Beware of anyone who is defensive, has excuses for not doing the testing or can't find their health certificates. You can look up results online by visiting www.offa.org. Look for CHIC numbers. These numbers indicate that the breeder is doing the extra health testing recommended by the breed club. Don't believe them if they say their vet gave the okay to breed. Only a board certified specialist can determine if a dog has hip dysplasia, eye issues, is deaf, etc.

May I see the contract stating all of the conditions that are involved in the sale of this puppy?

You should be able to view this contract before you give a deposit. Look for a contract that protects the buyer as well as the seller, and the puppy first and foremost. A good breeder will always take the dog back if you are unable to care for it for the life of the dog.

Do you provide a written health guarantee? What does your written health guarantee include?

Breeders will offer anywhere from a 2-4 year genetic health guarantee. Most will offer a replacement puppy or refund some of the purchase price if your puppy manifests a serious genetic defect. Read this carefully. If your puppy should end up with a genetic ailment, your breeder should never demand the dog back before giving you a refund.

What are the requirements in regards to spaying or neutering?

Concerned, responsible breeders will *insist* that you neuter your pet puppy as soon as it is old enough. A pet puppy will be placed on a limited registration. If there is no spay/neuter contract or they offer full registration if you pay more...this is a warning sign. Many back yard breeders or unethical breeders do this. It is against AKC rules to offer full registration if you "pay more."

Does the breeder have a non-breeding clause in the contract?

Not having this clause may indicate that the breeder does not care what happens to the puppies after they leave the breeder's home.

Are the parents available for me to see?

It would be ideal to see both parents, but sometimes the bitch is sent to a stud dog at another location. You should be able to see the mother and any other dogs on site when you visit. If the breeder hesitates, you should wonder why. Are the dogs kept in clean, healthy conditions? Are they calm and friendly?

How old is the mom and how many litters has she had?

Bitches should not be bred until they are at least two years old and have passed at least minimum health tests. In addition, they should not be consistently bred at every heat cycle. For example, if the dam is 5 years old, one would expect her to have had no more than 3 litters.

How do you socialize your puppies?

Socialization is so important to getting a well-adjusted, well-mannered dog. Ideally, you want the breeder to have raised the puppies in the house, around the normal daily activities of a household. A breeder who allows their puppies to experience different sounds, surfaces, etc. and meet different people is trying hard. A puppy raised without this important social interaction can be shy, fearful, aggressive, or have other problems as they get older. Dogs need to know how to play, how to handle new situations, how to relate to people.

When can I take the puppy home?

Puppies usually go home between 9 and 12 weeks. Avoid any breeder who wants to send home a puppy younger than seven weeks. Puppies sent home too early don't have the chance to develop healthy interactions with other dogs, to develop the social skills to be a confident member of the family, can be sickly or have problems eating.

Will you be available in the future to answer any questions I may have on raising and training my puppy?

When you buy from an ethical breeder, you are buying that person's knowledge, experience and commitment to the breed. You should feel comfortable calling the breeder with questions at any time throughout the life of the dog and the breeder should be happy to respond to your questions. The breeder should also be willing to help, should something happen to you and the dog needs a new home.

Do you have a waiting list for your puppies and how does it work?

Many breeders have a waiting list. If a breeder asks for a deposit, be sure it is a refundable deposit and you have that in writing.

How do you screen potential puppy buyer homes, and do you have a questionnaire for me to fill out?

A good breeder will be very **interested in who you are** and somewhat choosy about whether you are able to provide an adequate home for one of their cherished pups. A breeder who wants to meet you, your kids, your spouse, your other pets, or talk to your veterinarian is simply trying to make sure that you will take good care of

their pup. Do not resent this. Avoid breeders who take credit card orders over the internet and ship puppies to anyone who wants them or tells you they don't need an application.

Area's to observe.

Is the home clean and orderly?

Are the breeder's dogs healthy in appearance? Are they clean and groomed?

It can be a messy proposition to raise a litter of puppies, but puppies should not be wallowing in waste, covered with fleas, or otherwise appear neglected.

Keep in mind that many longhaired bitches will shed their coats heavily during this time, so if the puppies' mother appears a little ratty it is not necessarily inappropriate or unusual.

Do you like the temperaments of the puppies' parents? Remember, temperament is genetic! Avoid puppies from bitches that demonstrate *any* aggression or shyness. Don't be afraid to ask the breeder to demonstrate the bitch's good temperament to you.

Often overlooked, but important - do you like the breeder? Will you feel comfortable relying on this person as a resource to help you if you ever run into problems with your pup? If you feel that the breeder is abrasive, rude, ignorant, or otherwise disagreeable, look elsewhere to buy your puppy. One of the greatest advantages of buying from a breeder is the support and assistance they can offer you throughout your dog's life.

Does your breeder respect veterinarians, trainers, groomers, breeders, and their peers in the dog world? Beware of breeders who are paranoid or hostile towards other professionals. In general, good breeders are socially well-networked. They are liked, like others, and respect competent professionals in their field. A good breeder should make the effort to know other good breeders (especially of their own breed and in their geographic area). It is important for a breeder to strive to improve their knowledge and understanding of their breed and submit to peer critique, even if it is not necessarily formalized (as in the show ring).

Good luck in your search for a breeder. If this all seems too complicated, you can visit Havanese Rescue Inc at www.havanescue.com and give one of these special Havanese a second chance at a wonderful life.