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Questions for a prospective service dog breeder

by Mareth Perry

PSDP Introduction—

Mareth is a longtime, engaged PSDP community member who gives valued advice. On PSDP's [Peer Guidance Group](#), she shared a version of this thorough collection of questions for breeders. Strategically using these questions can improve your chances of finding the best-fit source for your prospective service dog puppy.

There are a lot of options below, so be careful not to overwhelm a breeder with all of them at once. Many of the questions only come into play after you've started a relationship and begun to learn about their breeding. Developing a relationship with a breeder is a two-way street, so it will take multiple exchanges and some thoughtfulness. Good breeders want good homes for their puppies, so you're being evaluated, too!

We recommend seeking the advice along the way of peers who have been through this process. This can help you avoid ruining your chances with a good breeder, or otherwise railroading yourself down a regrettable path—like getting the wrong dog for you. Our Peer Guidance Group has a lot of people who love to help with this, so join early if you're considering getting a prospective service dog!

Mareth's article is smartly divided into distinct sections, and here's a road map:

- General Questions
- Breeding Program
- Health Issues
- Puppy Purchase
- Working Dogs
- Parents of My Puppy's Litter
- My Puppy's Litter
- My Puppy

Mareth—

Here are the questions I asked when I was looking for a Bouvier ("BdF") puppy. Just replace "BdF" with whatever breed you're looking for.

General Questions:

How long have you been a BdF breeder?

What made you decide to begin breeding BdF?

Are you a member of the ABdFC? [Find out the name of any clubs associated with your desired breed and ask about that breed.]

Do you breed any dogs other than BdF? If so, what breed(s)?

What food and/or supplements do you feed your dogs?

May I contact your veterinarian for a reference?

Do you have a website to showcase your dogs? If so, what is the URL?

Do you train your own dogs or do you work with a professional trainer?

What training method(s) do you use?

Are you actively involved in showing, trialing, and/or working competitions with your dogs?

How many adult dogs do you have on-site?

How many puppies do you have on-site?

Where do your dogs live?

Breeding Program:

What is the main emphasis in your breeding program?

What temperament are you aiming to produce?

How often do you breed a litter of puppies?

How many litters have you produced since you began breeding BdFs?

How many litters have you bred this year?

Do you have a waiting list to purchase puppies from your line?

Do you allow potential purchasers to visit your facility? May they visit multiple times?

Where are puppies whelped?

Where do puppies live until they are sent to live with their new owners?

Do you temperament test?

- If so, what temperament test do you use?
- At what age do you test the puppies?

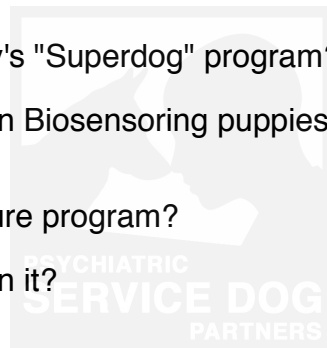
What do you do in raising puppies to help produce well-rounded temperaments?

Have you heard of the U.S. military's "Superdog" program?

- If so, what are your thoughts on Biosensing puppies?

Have you heard of the Puppy Culture program?

- If so, what are your thoughts on it?



At what age do you let your puppies go to their new homes?

Why do you feel this is the best time to release them?

Do you begin any training with the puppies before they go to their new homes?

- If so, what?

Health Issues:

What can you tell me about the longevity background of the dogs in your line?

How old is/was the oldest BdF you have produced?

What health problems have been encountered in your line and at what age(s) did the symptoms manifest?

Do you have genetic testing performed on your breeding stock? If so, for which genetic problems do you test?

What do you feel is the most outstanding attribute of the dogs you've bred?

What would you like to improve in your line?

Puppy Purchase:

Do you match the puppies to their purchasers or allow the purchaser to choose a puppy?

Do you require purchasers to sign a contract? If so, may I have a copy of a blank contract emailed to me?

Do you distinguish between show quality, service or therapy dog quality, and pet quality when determining pricing, breeding rights, etc.?

Do you require spaying/neutering of puppies that will not be shown?

- If so, by what age do you require this to be done?
- Do you require proof of spay/neuter from the purchaser?
- What is your policy if the purchaser does not spay/neuter the puppy?

Do you follow up with the purchasers to find out how the puppies are progressing as they grow? Once they reach adulthood?

Do you provide lifetime support for owners of puppies you breed?

Under what conditions would you accept the return of a puppy you bred?

Are there any circumstances under which you would refuse to accept a puppy back from a purchaser?

Working Dogs:

Have any of the puppies you've produced been trained successfully to work in any of the following areas:

- As therapy dogs (visiting hospitals, nursing homes, etc.)?
- As medical alert dogs (to detect epilepsy, heart attack, migraines, diabetic highs/lows, etc.)?
- As service dogs to assist someone with a physical disability (blindness, deafness, wheelchair user, etc.)?
- As service dogs to assist someone with a mental/psychological or neurodivergent disability (PTSD, bipolar, TBI, autism, etc.)?

Do you have any objection to selling a puppy to someone whose intention is to train her/him as any of the above? If so, which and why?

Parents of My Puppy's Litter:

Sire's stats (name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.)?

Dam's stats (name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.)?

May I have a copy of their pedigrees?

What titles (working, dog sports, conformation) have these dogs been awarded?

How many times have you bred this bitch? If she's been bred before, how long ago was her previous litter whelped?

For what genetic defects have the dogs been tested?

What are the sire and dam's CERF, OFA, and/or PennHip test results?

At what age were their latest tests performed?

Does either one of them participate in dog sports (agility, obedience, tracking, rally, herding, schutzhund, etc.)?

What are the strengths of the sire and dam?

What are their weaknesses?

Why did you decide to breed these two dogs together?

Have they been bred together in the past? If so, what physical or behavioral issues have been noted in their offspring?

May I have references from purchasers of puppies from previous litters sired by and/or whelped by these dogs?

Have either of them worked as therapy dogs or service dogs?

My Puppy's Litter:

How many puppies were whelped?

Were all of them healthy?

Have any of them died? If so, what was the cause?

When were the puppies born?

Where are the puppies whelped and raised?

Have they been examined by a veterinarian?

- If so, at what age(s)?
- If not, why?

Have the puppies received any inoculations?

- If so, which one(s)?
- Who administered them?
- When were they administered?
- When are the booster shots needed (if applicable)?



My Puppy:

Was s/he temperament tested?

- If so, what testing method was used?
- How old was s/he when tested?
- What were the results of the test?
- May I have a copy of the results?

What food and/or supplements do you recommend to feed my puppy?

When should s/he be switched from puppy food to adult food?

What adult food and/or supplements do you recommend?

If you chose my puppy for me, what characteristics stood out to you about my puppy that caused you to recommend him/her as a service dog prospect for me?

Is there anything about my puppy that concerns you about his/her potential as a service dog?

Do you have any special advice for me in regard to working with my puppy?

Just a few notes:

(1) Before asking any questions, I sent an introductory email to each breeder. I described who I am and what I was looking for in a puppy. I also included a description of the life I could give a puppy, including what Mickey's (my current service dog's) typical day was like.

(2) Some breeders didn't want to answer my questions. I eliminated them from my list immediately; good breeders tend to LOVE to talk about their breed, their line, and their accomplishments.

(3) Some breeders will not sell puppies as service dog prospects. It is entirely up to you whether you disclose this. I chose to be fully open and honest about my plans for the puppy. It led to some breeders declining to sell me a puppy. And I had to be okay with that; I didn't argue or try to change their minds.

Psychiatric Service Dogs Partners' purpose is to promote the mental health of people using service dogs for psychiatric disabilities by educating, advocating, providing expertise, facilitating peer support, and promoting responsible service dog training and handling.