

One Puppy or Two? A Seller's Responsibility - by Donna Marchiori

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One Puppy or Two? A Seller's Responsibility.

Many new owners are convinced that a single puppy will be lonely and that two puppies will be much happier together. Some believe that rearing puppies in pairs is easier, expecting to halve the workload rather than double it. Sometimes people will buy litter-siblings, and sometimes they will buy two puppies of similar age from separate litters of either the same or different breeds.

New owners should be fully informed of the double expenditure to expect, especially during the first year. They need to know the approximate costs of worming, vaccinating, registering with local authority, desexing or joining ANKC affiliate (as appropriate), microchipping, training costs, fencing and shelter costs, boarding fees and pet insurance, not to mention equipment such as bowls, collars or halters, leashes, car harnesses and toys. These costs will increase of course, should things turn out less than perfect.

Prospective owners should also be disabused of any notion of breeding a brother-and-sister pair! If they are insistent on obtaining two puppies, they should also be strongly advised to desex either or both at the appropriate age, to avoid accidental matings. It amazes me how many general public dog owners think it's okay to breed siblings and who have no idea how to tell if a bitch is on heat.

Breeders and sellers of puppies have a very big responsibility in informing prospective buyers that buying two puppies at once is usually a really bad idea. The long term result is that often one of the dogs is removed (either sold, surrendered or destroyed), one or both dogs being desexed (which may have not been the initial desire of the owners) and it regularly results in aggression between the two dogs, incurring veterinary expense.

The very first thing that happens is that yes, the puppies are very happy together as they have comfort from each other. The owners are certain they've done the right thing, which is confirmed as they watch their new puppies sleep together, eat from the same bowl and create adorable-puppy-mayhem together.

This enables the first major problem to occur: the puppies create a very tight bond *with each other* at exactly the time when they are supposed to become attached to their new owners.

From this strong bonding, a second problem arises – two puppies which should have two separate names, but which respond to either name, or worse, to neither name. New owners will describe one puppy as really smart because it leads the way, while the sibling is apparently really dumb or ignorant because it follows or copies the other puppy. That the puppies behave this way is completely natural and breeders will acknowledge that in every litter there's a pup that leads, there are pups that follow and if you remove a leader from the litter, another puppy will take its place.

The next problem is encountered when these puppies present at puppy pre-school or obedience classes by which time the owners are beginning to suspect they took on more than they should as they see the destruction in their backyard. Usually only one owner (often the wife) can come to training, so somehow she is expected to train two puppies and get the same results as her classmates who are training a single puppy. The puppies may be timid, one more so than the other. This isn't uncommon even with single puppy households, but with dual-puppy households, the more timid puppy has another one to hide behind, and to look to for guidance and support. For this particular puppy to learn independence and self-confidence is virtually impossible. It has no need to take the lead because the other pup already shows the way. As very little is achieved whilst training two puppies at once, well-meaning instructors will attempt to separate the pair, which results in at least one of the pups, but usually both, being so distressed or distracted by the separation, that any hope of teaching either of them anything in class disappears altogether.

Another problem occurs at home when one puppy decides not to share dinner any more. Previously amiable companions suddenly argue over the dinner bowl, so owners begin feeding them from separate bowls. Then, one pup may begin gorging his food, then pushing the other pup away to scoff that dog's food too! Owners may then decide to separate the dogs altogether at meal times. The original expectation of two lifelong, happy companions is looking less likely.

The owners will see what used to be joyful puppy-play roll over into spats between the dogs which will occur for a thousand reasons that we humans simply don't understand. The dogs will at all times be at exactly the same point in their development, so they will be teething at the same time, they'll have sore gums together. They will mature sexually at the same time and share hormonal ups and downs. When one pup's having a bad time, the other one will be too, just considering two of their major developmental stages. They might argue over toys or being first through the gate, etc., which they *couldn't* do if there weren't two of them, and which they *wouldn't* do if one of them was already an adult.

If their behaviour is mild enough for their owners to keep them both, the puppies will develop into adults having reached a private agreement. It doesn't mean that as adults, both of them will be happy dogs because one of them may have to continue to compromise his behaviour for the sake of peace or possibly even his life, if aggression has been a factor. We won't know.

But what will definitely happen is that one puppy will be more suppressed than the other by sheer force of the other's personality, and that the owners will suffer because they have two dogs that don't get on quite as well as they did in the first month they arrived. Or the dogs could actually turn out to be fantastic buddies. In either case, both dogs will be oblivious to their owners as they're so busy with each other. It is entirely possible for two puppies to become very closely bonded and dependent on each other, without really *liking* each other very much.

If the owners make the decision to part with one of the dogs, either or both of the dogs might fret for the other, not to mention the enormous guilt their owners will feel, having to choose which one to keep. After separation there will be a major adjustment period and the less outgoing of the two dogs may not cope well without the other, even though he wasn't entirely happy when the other dog was around. Major commitment, patience and retraining will be necessary for both dogs, but owners are already disadvantaged by having lost the opportunity to bond with the dogs during the formative stages.

When people are convinced they're better off with two puppies, it's important to consider that although anything can happen, we would hope and assume that the two puppies remain in good health and live to be very old together. They will pass away within a short time of each other. This leaves the owners with a double tragedy in a short time.

If *at least* one year for the toy-and-small breeds and about four years for the larger breeds could be left between puppies, then the first dog has a chance to

bond closely with his human family, who will of course socialise him to other dogs and experiences whilst he's young and impressionable. He has the chance to mature, make all his own mistakes, to develop his own personality and confidence *without comparison* and to become a great leader. He will then be in a much better position as an adult dog, to welcome and assist in educating a new, much younger canine companion yet still young enough to enjoy and endure the attentions of a puppy. He will be able to discipline a puppy rather than compete with it. Puppies are much more respectful towards adult dogs than they are towards their litter mates – adult dogs don't put up with bad behaviour from puppies, their discipline is swift and decisive and the puppy doesn't have to guess the rules or make up his own!

Breeders should keep in mind breed reputation, as uninformed owners may blame a pup's misguided behaviour on the breed. For instance, an owner who has chosen to buy a Rottie pup and a Border Collie pup of the same age to keep each other company, might say "Rotties play rough and Border Collies are such wimps!" To a naïve pet owner, this may be what appears to be going on, because nobody told them that getting two puppies the same age was very complicated, never mind two puppies of such differing proportions, play-styles and natures.

There definitely are households which have successfully reared two puppies of the same age. Either they overcame some of the problems I've mentioned, or they were fantastic people who were aware of and committed to the extra workload and made sure that in the formative months the puppies received time-out from each other every day, and were heavily and happily socialised both individually and together, all over the place.

It's important for breeders (and pet shop staff) to honestly and fully inform prospective owners of the multiple drawbacks of two puppies at once and to question people about the ages of puppies and dogs they already own. This will save people much heartache, as well as save many dogs from unhappy lives.