

The costs of breeding dogs



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By: Gail T. Fisher

Recently a friend who is looking to adopt a dog commented that he thought it was outrageous that the breeders he was talking to were asking \$1200 for a puppy. On the surface, it sounds as if breeders are raking it in – after all, if you have six or eight puppies in a litter, and you sell them for \$1200 each, that’s an “easy” \$7,200-\$9,600.

I had to laugh when I thought about how much money it cost me to breed dogs for the twenty years I bred English Mastiffs. Responsible breeders do not do it for the money. In fact, reputable breeders usually work in “real” jobs to support their dog breeding habit.

Excluding the purchase price of the dam (the mother), raising and showing her to a Championship (my choice to only breed dogs that were Champions), here is a brief overview of typical expenses I experienced in breeding a litter of puppies.

It starts with health screenings to determine and eliminate (as much as possible) genetic issues and inherited diseases such as hip dysplasia (HD), progressive retinal atrophy (PRA), thyroid problems and other potential issues. Each test requires taking time away from your real job—often as much as a day—plus the costs involved. Some veterinary expenses are one-time only, but vaccinations and testing to determine the optimum health of the bitch before breeding are recurring expenses, as are post-partum veterinary costs after she whelps the litter. Let’s just estimate typical veterinary expenses as being equal to the price of a puppy.

Next is the stud fee paid to the owner of the male. This typically equals the price of a puppy. In addition to time and travel to bring the bitch to the male, there are often other expenses involved in the breeding itself. Much as we would like dogs to take care of “what comes naturally” without us, often there are additional expenses. The sire of the Standard Poodle that won the Non-Sporting Group at Westminster this year died 20 years ago. Clearly there were expenses involved in collecting, storing, recovering and then using his sperm to impregnate a bitch twenty years later. But let’s exclude time, travel, and other expenses such as this, and just say the stud fee is the price of a puppy.

There are countless little things that a breeder has to purchase including a whelping box, heat lamp, thermometer, baby scales, hemostat, suction bulb, towels, nail clippers, blankets, crates, toys and other miscellaneous supplies to have on hand – just in case. Then there are the books to read, and time expended in preparation for whelping.

There’s an increased cost in feeding the bitch during her pregnancy, and especially during nursing. Plus additional nutritional supplements and the cost of food for weaning the pups. Then there are vaccinations, worming and health certificates for the puppies before they go to their new homes, and any supplies provided to the puppy buyers. Often this includes a crate, food, leash, collar, toys, books and other materials. Without factoring in the breeder’s time, all these out-of-pocket expenses are likely about the price of one more puppy.

If all goes well, so far the litter costs the price of three puppies. But I can tell you from my own experience, it rarely goes well. It is not unusual for a bitch to need a C-section, for her to develop mastitis or other post-partum problems. It is also common for the entire litter to get diarrhea and require veterinary care, for at least one puppy to need more extensive veterinary care, and it is not unusual for a puppy to die (always after incurring huge expenses to try to save it). The costs of these unpredictable issues often equal the price

of two or more puppies. Even when an individual litter does not involve extra expenses, from a business perspective, there are costs carried over from past litters that did have problems.

And then there's time – an incalculable number of hours to do it right. Not just time spent delivering the litter, cleaning, caring for, feeding and optimizing their environment, there are the hours and hours involved in raising the puppies so they'll reach their full genetic potential. Then there's advertising, and the many hours spent with each potential puppy buyer – educating them and making sure they are as well informed as possible. After all, they're adopting a member of the family!

Even without adding in the purchase price of the bitch, plus costs involved in rearing, training and showing her prior to breeding, when you think about value for money, the cost of a puppy from a caring, responsible, reputable breeder really is a bargain.

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1

Written by **Cheryl Mousseau**, on 07-04-2009 06:09

As a breeder, I can't tell you how many times well meaning friends and potential dog owners have said the same things to me. I have a full time job. I have litters very selectively and only to continue and improve my line.

I am extremely particular, as are most breeders, as to the homes my puppies go to. There are interviews and referrals and if someone calls me and their first question is "how much are your puppies?"; I know that this is not the home for my puppy.

The costs you outlined are under perfect circumstances. My last breeding, the stud dog was in Oregon so that meant paying for shipping and costs at Repro vets for AI for my girl. There are ultra sounds and x-rays during pregnancy and then, when things don't always go right...as with my last litter, visits to Emergency Vets for C-sections to insure the well being of the puppies and the mom. Sick puppies can also add to costs. It happens.

I have also paid up to \$1000 for puppy sitters while I am at work.

My last litter, I did not even break even. No reputable breeder does this for the money.

Thanks, Gail.

Cheryl Mousseau

Pondview Labs

2

Written by **Cindy Williams**, on 03-12-2009 07:49

Dear Gail,

We breeders owe you a huge debt of gratitude for your articles!!!! You are a wonderful voice for us. I thank you SO MUCH.

Have a wonderful day!

Love,

Cindy 😊



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