



## The Soggy Dog Blog: Pick of the Litter

We often get requests from clients for the “pick of the litter” puppy. In other words, the client wants to be able to review the litter in its entirety and have first choice on pups. There’s nothing unnatural for a consumer to want choices, or for someone to want to go first. After all, this is the country that punishes kids for skipping in line and lets you order your burger any way you want it. Going first and having choices is the American way. But does this follow in choosing your puppy? How important really is “going first” and what are the real pros and cons?

We’ve probably made this point too many times already, but it’s 100% relevant in this conversation: As a puppy consumer, the product you are actually buying is *genetics*. You aren’t buying waggy butts and floppy ears – all puppies have those. You can look at two litters of yellow Lab pups – mine and those of an unknown breeder – and likely, you won’t be able to tell the difference on the surface. But our pups are really nothing alike, beyond their childish good looks.

When you place a deposit with a reputable breeder, you are making a purchase of that breeder’s genetics. A reputable breeder has spent years perfecting their lines, taking care to include dogs with good looks and temperament and excellent drive, and no testable genetic defects. We spend the first two years of a female’s life evaluating her looks, temperament, and drive; at two years of age, if she fits the bill, we pursue her health clearances and proceed to breed her at her next heat cycle. If she doesn’t meet all of our stringent criteria, she is spayed and retired to the foster guardian family that we assigned her to. Good breeders have a large enough pool of dogs that they don’t need to breed any animal that doesn’t measure up, and good breeders also have relationships with other good breeders from which to infuse new genetics into their own lines. Good breeders know where to find good stud service and when and where to purchase new dogs for their programs. Managing good bloodlines is a *full time job*.

Assuming then, that you have located a reputable breeder that has been managing his bloodlines for a decade (or two!), you now understand what we mean when we say that you are purchasing *genetics* and not (just) a puppy. ALL of the pups in a litter will share their parents’ good looks and drive. If mom has a beautiful fox red coat with excellent luster and dad is a waterfowling beast, guess what? Their sons and daughters will have these characteristics too. Pups that *today* look larger or smaller, more tame or more wild, darker or lighter in color, etc., will generally all be reset to the same point, given time, because they all share the same genetics. The smallest pup will eventually end up about the same size as mom or dad, the “quieter” pup will be the same beast in the field as dad, and the lighter colored one will likely have a deepening in coat color to match mom’s. And it’s not just mom and dad’s looks and drive entering into the

equation: it's *several generations* of looks and drive making these pups the dog that they will grow up to be someday.

You hopefully now understand the difference between picking a puppy and buying genetics. When working with a good breeder and excellent bloodlines, you should feel confident in taking home any dog produced by their kennel, whether you have a pick of ten or one. Bright eyes and waggy tails aside, if you've done your homework on the front end, you can't go wrong with any pick!