

Finding a Mentor by Bette Wynn

As our previous article suggests, those who want to be successful in dogs reach their goals much more quickly when they have a good mentor to help guide them. Finding a qualified mentor isn't always easy; however it can be done with a little persistence and some homework.

If you are completely new to the breed you need to begin by finding and meeting schipperke breeders. Check with the American Kennel Club (www.akc.org) to find the parent club and ask them to send you a list of breeders in your area. Check out the various dog shows in your area and attend whenever you can. (A list of show superintendents can be found at www.bonchien.com) Introduce yourself to those showing once they come out of the ring. Ask if they have a few minutes to talk with you. Most exhibitors are more than willing to talk "dogs" after the competition is over. In this day and age, the internet is a wonderful resource...spend some time looking at schipperke websites to help you get familiar with the breed and some of the well known breeders...that way, when you meet them at shows you will be more familiar with them and their lines. Find and attend local kennel club meetings (www.akc.org). While those members may not breed schipperkes, perhaps they know someone who does and can introduce you. Belonging to a local kennel club will get you involved with other dog people, which in turn will help you find more schipperke people. Once you get to know and meet some schipperke people, they in turn can introduce you to others...and your "schipperke network" begins to build.

Do Your Homework

Hopefully, before you purchased your first dog, you spent some time doing your homework. That homework includes getting to know the breed, deciding on a line of dogs you like, by studying the standard and reading all of the available schipperke books you can get your hands on. Buy the best dog you can find! Breeding and showing dogs is not cheap, nor are good quality puppies or adults cheap. Beware of the "breeder" who sells dogs much cheaper than the going market.

Most breeders are more likely to sell you a good quality male over a female. This gives the breeder a chance to see if you will actually prove yourself and show and finish the dog and are not just interested in something to breed. It also gives the breeder a chance to get to know you and to begin to build a mentoring relationship.

It is not very often that a relatively newcomer is offered a "topnotch" dog (you haven't proven yourself yet) so if you are lucky and one is offered to you...jump at the chance! The cost will be worth it, especially if it is already finished and has already produced!

Many mentor relationships begin when you purchase your first dog, which is why that purchase turns out to be so important. Successful breeders generally take an interest in the people they sell to. Cultivate that relationship! Ask if they are willing to mentor with you. If they agree, be prepared to take their advice and suggestions. Be grateful for the time they spend with you and be serious in your desire to learn.

Since the schipperke breed is still relatively small, it is often difficult to find a mentor that

lives near you. Your mentor can come from other breeds as well...just because they don't know "schipperkes" doesn't mean they don't know "dogs" and can't be of great help to you. Your mentor can work with you "long distance" via the internet, and still offer a great deal of help via email, pictures and meeting at specialties. Be creative!

It is never too late to look for a mentor. If you have been breeding awhile, but aren't accomplishing what you had hoped for, work on finding a mentor you like and trust and feel comfortable working with.

What to Look For in a Mentor

Your mentor should be willing to give you advice on all aspects of breeding, owning and showing schipperkes. They should help you select and evaluate your breeding stock, and help you decide where and when to breed. This person should have considerable time in the breed, and should have accomplished a nice show and breeding record in that amount of time. Your mentor should encourage YOU to think about the dogs you are working with and have and what you hope to gain in your breeding program. They should encourage you to keep educating yourself by attending specialties, seminars, health clinics, reading books, and meeting new people. Most of all, a great mentor will know when to let go...and encourage you to make your own decisions.

As you can see, a mentor will invest a lot of time and energy into helping you become successful, therefore, be appreciative of that time, and be supportive and loyal to the mentor who has invested his or her time in you! And, don't forget to show your appreciation whenever and however you can. When YOU become an accomplished breeder...be willing to mentor with a newcomer!