



So You Think You Want A Beauceron?

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The Beauceron is a wonderful and versatile breed. Before deciding whether the Beauceron is the right breed for you, take the time to meet some dogs and speak to their owners. One way to learn about the breed is to join the American Beauceron Club (AKC parent club), which provides members the opportunity to meet and discuss the breed with fellow Beauceron owners and fanciers from across the country.

Another way is to attend local AKC shows where Beaucerons are entered. Learn about the breed by talking with as many breeders and owners as you can. Be sure to meet Beaucerons of various ages to get an overall sense of the breed as well as the energy levels of both young and mature Beaucerons.

Although they are relatively easy to train and obedient, the Beauceron is not a dog for novice owners. This breed requires an experienced, dedicated and active owner as they have strong personalities and a need for both physical exercise and mental stimulation. Under-stimulated dogs can become destructive as well as difficult to handle and may exercise their frustrations on you or your home. The decision to add a Beauceron to your household should be well thought out and agreed to by every family member.

Here are a few things to take into consideration when looking for a Beauceron:

BREED TRAITS.

The Beauceron is a confident, highly intelligent, independent and strong-willed dog. They are typically very protective of their owners and their territory and are generally reserved or aloof with strangers. Beaucerons are slow to mature compared to many other large breed dogs, so don't expect your dog to "act like an adult" until around three years of age.

Although the Beauceron is judged in the herding group, they are tending dogs and do not work stock in the same manner as a Border Collie. Their instinct is to be rather "velcro-like" with their owners, which should not be mistaken for lack of confidence. The Beauceron who follows his owner from room to room is simply doing what comes naturally – that is, "tending the flock". This can be a bit unnerving when your dog barges into the bathroom and stares at you while you take a shower!

Beaucerons can be physically demonstrative with their owners. This can take the form of jumping up on you, leaping through the air as high as your face with all four paws off the ground, or running toward you at full speed only to (hopefully) swerve away at the last minute. Beaucerons can also be very "mouthy" dogs. Some prefer to have something in their mouths almost all the time, while others tend to grab at your hands or clothes. This behavior is not limited just to puppies and can continue well into adulthood.

ENERGY LEVEL.

The Beauceron is an active, athletic breed that requires a great deal of physical and mental exercise. Owners must be prepared to provide the mental and physical activity that the dog needs on a daily basis. This is not a couch-potato dog! Some lines of Beaucerons have an endless supply of energy and cannot be tired out. A bored Beauceron is likely to find something to do that isn't good for the dog, you or your home.

KNOW THE BREED STANDARD.

Become familiar with the AKC breed standard before you buy.

The breeder should know and understand the breed standard, and strive to produce puppies that are as close to the standard as possible in health, conformation and temperament. Ask the breeder why they chose to breed these particular dogs. Responsible breeders only breed when they are convinced that their knowledge, experience, and devotion to "their" breed will produce an exceptional litter of puppies that are correct both in temperament and conformation. They breed to preserve and to enhance the characteristics and qualities that make the breed unique. In short, they breed to improve the breed.

TRAINING.

The Beauceron requires firm but fair training and handling on a consistent basis. There is no one "right method" for all dogs, but whatever method you choose, be sure it accounts for the fact that this is a highly intelligent, and sometimes independent, breed. The importance of early and proper socialization and consistent training cannot be overstated. It is also important to understand that Beaucerons do not tolerate harsh treatment from anyone, especially strangers. Therefore, it is best to avoid harsh training methods – particularly those that involve physical corrections, since these methods generally do not work well with this breed. Although the Beauceron is a very versatile breed that can excel in just about any activity available to dogs, they can be rather "pushy" and require an owner who can provide leadership, training and socialization. If you plan to participate in a particular sport, look for a breeder who has produced dogs that are successfully competing in that sport. Keep in mind that well-behaved dogs that are successfully competing in any sport have had a lot of training to reach that level.

HEALTH ISSUES.

Realize that no breed is without health problems. Ask the breeder what health testing they have done on the sire and dam and if they are aware of any health issues in their lines (parents, grandparents and great-grandparents). Even among the most responsible breeders, health issues may arise. How a breeder responds to such problems is a more accurate indication of how reputable the breeder is.

A few health issues to be aware of include:

- Canine hip dysplasia (CHD).

The primary abnormality in canine hip dysplasia is varying degrees of hip joint laxity, (looseness of hip joint), subluxation (partial dislocation of the hip joint), and severe arthritic change (a degenerative condition).

- Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM).

A disease of the heart muscle which causes the heart to enlarge and not function properly. Typically, both the ventricle (lower chamber) and the atria (upper chamber) enlarge and the ventricle loses its ability to contract and pump blood out to the body or the lungs.

- Eye Problems.

There is a range of eye problems that can affect dogs. A yearly ophthalmologic examination by a certified veterinarian eye specialist is recommended for all breeds of dogs.

- Allergies.

Allergies can be either food-based or environmental. The most common food allergens are beef and milk products, cereals (wheat, corn, soy), chicken and eggs.

- Gastric Dilation and Bloat.

This condition occurs mostly in large breed dogs with deep chest cavities. Gas in the stomach causes it to swell. In some cases, the stomach rotates on its axis (known as torsion), closing off both ends of it. This condition can be life threatening to the dog if not treated immediately, usually through surgical intervention.

- Osteochondrosis Desiccans (OCD).

OCD is a hereditary disease due to a defect in the cartilage overlying the head of one of the long bones. It is usually found in the shoulder or elbow joints and rarely affects the hocks or stifles. The condition is characterized by cracks and flaps in articular cartilage, which cause inflammation, joint instability, pain, lameness, and degenerative joint disease.

MEET THE SIRE AND DAM.

While it is not always possible to meet the sire and dam, you should make every attempt to do so. The breeder may not always own the stud dog so ask for photos or a video if you are unable to meet him. If you cannot visit the breeder, ask if it is possible to obtain a video and/or photos showing the following:

- The dam relaxing in the home.
- The dam interacting with people, other dogs and/or animals, both ON and OFF their own property
- The puppies interacting with the dam and their littermates
- Puppies interacting with people
- Ask for the same kind of video and/or photos of the sire

Pay careful attention to the dam's temperament but realize that if the puppies are young, the dam may be protective of them. You may want to meet the dam separately so you can see what she is like when her pups are not around. Keep in mind that she is raising your future dog. If the temperament of either the dam or the puppies is overly shy or aggressive, you should reconsider buying one of these puppies.

BUY FROM A REPUTABLE BREEDER.

There are relatively few Beauceron breeders in this country so it is important to be patient when searching for a pup. The puppy closest to your home might not be the right one for you so you may want to expand your search. Many breeders are willing to ship a puppy to a buyer and most puppies travel quite well. There are also animal ground transport services that will drive the puppy to you anywhere in the continental USA.

Stay away from puppy mills, pet stores and puppy brokers. Puppies from these sources may be more readily available and/or slightly less expensive initially, but they can cost you dearly in the long run with health issues and temperament problems. This is not the time to hunt for a bargain. Your new puppy will be a member of your family for his/her lifetime, so you'll want to make a wise investment. It might take some time to find the right breeder with an upcoming litter. Be prepared to wait; it will be worth your while.

A responsible breeder will be there for you throughout the lifetime of the dog to support you and help with any problems you might encounter with the dog. If, for any reason, you cannot keep the dog, a responsible breeder will always take the dog back, regardless of its age.

CONDUCT INTERVIEWS.

Interview potential breeder(s) and request references from previous puppy buyers. Don't be surprised when the breeder interviews you as well. Take this as a compliment that the breeder really cares for their puppies and wants to find the best homes. Be honest with the breeder about how much time and energy you can devote to the dog. He/she is trying to ensure the puppy will be a suitable match for your lifestyle.

- Ask the breeder(s) if they are members in good standing with the American Beauceron Club and contact the Membership Secretary to verify their current membership status. If they are members in good standing with the ABC, they have signed a Code of Ethics that requires them to apply ethical breeding practices and to follow a certain standard of care when raising their puppies and dealing with puppy buyers. (e.g. providing a written sales contract, health guarantees, etc.) Even if the breeder is a member of the breed parent club, don't assume this guarantees healthy, happy and stable puppies. You still need to do your research by checking references, talking with other buyers from that breeder and attending events where their dogs are being shown or in a trial.
- Ask the breeder why they chose these particular dogs to breed and what health testing has been done on the sire/dam. Ask if there is any history of allergies or other known health problems in either the dam or the sire or any of their offspring (if either has been bred before).
- Find out how many litters the female has had. Does the number indicate that she has had a litter each time she comes into season (usually twice a year) without any breaks between litters? A bitch should not be bred more than twice out of every three seasons. Some responsible breeders of working bitches limit breeding to age two, four and six.
- Ask the breeder the age of the sire and the dam. Each should be a minimum of two years of age. In fact, because this breed is slow to mature, many breeders will wait until the dogs are at least three years of age before breeding.
- Ask for the parents and grandparents permanent OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) number. If you have the registered name, AKC registered number or the OFA number, then you can check the OFA's website for the actual hip ratings. If the parents or grandparents are imported from another country, ask to see proof of hip clearance from that country's registry.
- If you want to participate in a sport, try to select a breeder whose dogs are successfully competing in the sport that interests you.
- Ask the breeder if you will be receiving full or limited AKC registration papers. If limited registration, ask what conditions must be fulfilled in order for the breeder to change this to full registration.
- Understand your sales contract and verify that the breeder will supply you with the puppy's health records from their veterinarian, the individual AKC registration papers for the puppy, and a three-generation pedigree.
- Ask for references and be sure to contact them.

CHOOSING SHOW vs. PET QUALITY.

Prices for puppies will vary based on many factors, such as being "show" or "pet" quality, whether the ears have been cropped, what titles the sire and dam have achieved and what their previous puppies have accomplished. The only difference between them is the presence of an undesirable fault that would prevent it from becoming a successful show dog. If you are not interested in showing or breeding your dog, a pet quality puppy is usually less expensive but is still every bit a Beauceron. Unfortunately, there will always be people who try to capitalize on a situation where the demand for pups exceeds the quality of pups being produced, so be careful. A higher price tag is not always a sign of quality, just as a lower price is not always a "good deal".

If you are seeking a show quality puppy, know the breed disqualifications and don't buy a puppy that has one. Also keep in mind the disqualifications that apply to all breeds, such as not having two descended testicles in a male. Examine the parents for a disqualifying fault. If there is one, the puppy

may not have the fault but can be carrying the gene for it. If you plan to breed your puppy some day, this would not be a good choice for your future breeding stock since the fault(s) can show up again in future generations. When buying a show puppy, ask the breeder if you will be receiving full or limited AKC registration papers. If limited registration, ask what conditions must be fulfilled in order for the breeder to change this to full registration. Limited registration means the dog cannot be shown in AKC conformation events and any puppies he or she produces will not be eligible for AKC registration. The dog can participate in any other AKC sport. Most breeders offer a limited registration for their pet quality puppies.

IMPORTANCE OF A SALES CONTRACT.

Make sure the breeder has a sales contract that covers all the items of importance: health guarantees, replacement/refund policies, and under what circumstances each can be invoked. If a problem arises with your puppy, you may wish to include the option of having the breeder replace the puppy or give you a refund. If so, that is something that should be written into the contract before you sign it. If the breeder has acted with due diligence in selecting their breeding, but still a serious genetic issue arises, you may not want a replacement puppy from a related breeding or a repeat breeding of the same pair. Along with the sales contract, the breeder should also supply you with the puppy's health records from their veterinarian, the individual AKC registration papers for the puppy, and a three-generation pedigree. A good contract will clearly state what the breeder will do to correct a problem.

GROOMING.

Beaucerons shed like any other dog. The Beauceron has a double coat - the undercoat being relatively soft and lighter color, with the top coat being rough and water-proof. There is no hiding the fact that a large black dog lives in your house, especially during shedding seasons. A good brushing every day during shedding seasons and a weekly brushing the rest of the time will go a long way in keeping your Beauceron looking its best.

FEEDING.

Ask the breeder what they feed and recommend. Be sure it is a quality food and one that you can readily obtain for your dog. If you want to change the food to a better quality, you will have to do it gradually.

CHILDREN.

As a rule, dogs and children should always be supervised by a responsible adult. No dog should ever be left unattended with young children, and Beaucerons are no different. While many Beaucerons are very tolerant and gentle with children, the simple fact is that Beaucerons are large, powerful dogs and even a young pup can easily knock a child down and injure them. As with any dog, early and ongoing socialization is vital to establishing a positive association with children. Be sure to ask the breeder what their particular dogs are like around children or, better yet, observe their dogs interacting with children or ask for a videotape showing their dogs interacting with children. Keep in mind that some dogs may not be as tolerant with unfamiliar children as they would with children they know and trust.

Please take your time when searching for a breeder and your future puppy. Your dog will be a part of your family for many years and should be carefully chosen to best suit your lifestyle and the needs of the dog.