**AKC Registered Puppies (Are AKC Papers Important?)**

By Michele Welton. Copyright © 2000-2013

At some point, if you're talking to an unknowledgeable breeder, you're likely to hear something like this: "My puppies come with AKC papers and a pedigree!"

They expect you to respond with an awed whistle.

Here's a better response: **O yay.**

Now, you might be surprised to hear this, because you probably thought that AKC registered puppies meant **good quality**. That's what the AKC would like you to believe. But it's not true.

The truth about AKC registered puppies is this:

* The AKC will register any puppy whose **parents** are registered.
* The AKC registered those parents because **their** parents were registered.
* And so on.

AKC registration is a mechanical process, a chain of numbers.

You send the AKC money. If the owners of your puppy's parents and grandparents were all good doobies who kept the chain intact by sending in their own money, the AKC will add your puppy to the chain, sending you a piece of paper with a number on it. Voila . . . your puppy is registered.

As Dr. Herm David, Ph.D. says, "The AKC has an infinite supply of numbers. It's a good business to be in."

"What about a pedigree? Doesn't a pedigree mean good quality?"

'Fraid not. Send more money, and the AKC will access their database again and spit out the names of your puppy's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, as many generations as you're willing to pay for. Voila . . . your puppy's pedigree.

A pedigree is just a list of doggy names.

Registration papers and pedigrees don't tell you a single thing about a dog other than its place in the chain of names.

To get registration papers or a pedigree, a dog doesn't need to meet any qualifications of health, temperament, behavior, or sound structure.

None whatsoever. A dog can be sickly, vicious, obese, ears pointing every which way, **EVEN PURPLE** – and the AKC will issue the exact same kind of registration number they give to the Best of Breed winner at the Westminster Kennel Club show.

"Good grief! And here I thought AKC registered meant good quality!"

Don't be fooled. Registration papers don't suggest quality in a dog any more than they suggest quality in a car. Does buying a car with registration papers mean it won't be a clunker? Of course not.

In fact, registration papers suggest quality in CARS more than in dogs, because in most states a car can only be registered if it has at least passed a smog/pollutant check and often a mechanical safety check.

The AKC registers dogs with no health or safety checks at all.

Hopefully you will never again make the mistake of believing that the existence of AKC papers or a pedigree has anything whatsoever to do with a puppy's quality. ***AKC registered puppies with pedigrees*** is just not a big selling point, no matter how loudly a breeder trumpets it in his classified ad.

"But papers at least guarantee that a dog is purebred, right?"

Boy, I'm really beginning to feel like the bearer of bad news here!

No. ***Being purebred*** has nothing to do with registration papers. ***Pure bred*** means that a puppy inherits the limited combination of genes that have been "fixed" in the breed's gene pool. This limited set of genes is what makes the puppy grow up to be a certain size, have a certain type of coat, color, etc. Since those genes are the only genes his parents have to give, they're the only genes the puppy can inherit.

Thus, a "pure bred" dog must inherit genes for smallish size, brown/black/white color, floppy ears, a short coat that sheds, etc. Those genes are fixed in the breed's gene pool – there are no other choices.

That's what makes a dog purebred – inheriting genes from the fixed gene pool of his breed. The presence or absence of registration papers has no effect on those genes.

In fact, a dog can have registration papers, yet still not be purebred.

**What???**

It's true. A dog can have registration papers, yet not be purebred, because his registration papers can be falsified. Most registries, such as the AKC, operate primarily on the honor system. They simply take the breeder's word for it that "King" and "Queen" were really the parents of Solomon.

But scams happen all the time.

1. Let's say Dishonest Dave has two purebred Boxers with registration papers.
2. The female is accidentally bred by a stray dog of unknown ancestry.
3. Dishonest Dave is unwilling to give up the $600 he could get for "AKC registered Boxer puppies" so when the litter arrives, he simply fills out the litter registration paperwork – claiming that his BOXER was actually the father.
4. The AKC will dutifully mail him a packet of Boxer registration papers for each puppy, which he will happily pass along to the buyer of each puppy....collecting his $600 as he does so.
5. And no one will be the wiser until the puppies grow up and start to look suspiciously non-Boxerish.

Fortunately, the AKC has a new DNA testing program now, where participating breeders submit DNA samples of parents and puppies, which conclusively proves parentage. If you want to be sure of who your puppy's parents really are, look for breeders who participate in this program.

And always remember that GENES make a dog purebred. The presence or absence of registration papers doesn't change the genes inside a dog. He can be purebred without having papers – and sadly, he can have papers without really being purebred.

"So are papers and pedigrees worth anything at all?"

Oh, yes – let me explain. Many purebred puppies are offered for sale without papers, or with papers but no pedigree, or with only a short 3-generation pedigree (which is virtually worthless). These sellers will tell you that you don't need registration papers or pedigrees if you just want a pet. Papers and pedigrees, they say, are only necessary if you want to show or breed your dog.

This is absolutely false.

**Registration papers and pedigrees are the only way you can determine whether a puppy you're considering buying has been inbred too much.**

Excessive inbreeding can result in serious health and temperament problems as a puppy matures. Excessive inbreeding is one reason that so many purebred dogs are unhealthy and/or mentally unstable.

So you really DO want papers and a pedigree with a purebred puppy – not because their presence indicates a good quality dog, but because their ABSENCE means you can't evaluate this puppy for inbreeding and thus you won't know how much he is at risk for developing health or behavior problems as he grows up.

To make matters worse, anyone who offers purebred puppies for sale without registration papers or pedigrees obviously doesn't know about any of this.....so what ELSE has he done wrong in breeding and raising this puppy? When you reward ignorant breeders with money, they'll just keep on doing what they're doing – we don't want to encourage that, do we?

So now you know a little about registration papers and pedigrees and how they can be very helpful.

**But you still need answers to these questions:**

* When you look at a pedigree, how can you tell if there's too much inbreeding? How much is too much?
* What does a "good" pedigree look like, anyway? What about a "bad" pedigree?
* If a puppy doesn't have **AKC** papers, but instead has papers from a different registry (like CKC, UKC, ACA, APRI) – is this okay?
* If a puppy comes with something called LIMITED registration papers, (rather than FULL registration papers) – is this okay?