

So You Want a Pet/Companion GSD....

By Carissa Kuehn

"All I want is a good German Shepherd pet for my family. Why pay over \$1000 to this breeder over here when I can pay \$650 (or less) to this other breeder down the street? All I want is a pet!"

"I just want a good German Shepherd companion for myself/my family. I'm not interested in doing Schutzhund or IPO or anything like that. I don't need a big-named pedigreed pup from highly accomplished parents or from people breeding for Schutzhund because, well, I just want a pet puppy. I don't need all that other stuff."

Does this sound familiar? This is a common conundrum that many people face. They want a good German Shepherd puppy that can be a companion or pet in their home. But why should they pay over \$1000 for a puppy that is just going to be a pet? After all, there are plenty of "breeders" out there selling "pet quality" GSDs for much less than that. These pet GSD breeders often seem much more affordable and of a better fit for the pet-only crowd than those who breed for working dogs (and ask \$1500+ for a puppy). But is that "pet" GSD breeder really the best bet for finding a healthy, stable family companion?

Perhaps this is the situation you are facing at this moment. All you want is a pet, but there are many factors rolled into what makes a good family pet. It is much more than just getting a puppy from dogs bred solely to produce "good companions". For example, you may "just want a pet-quality puppy", but:

1. Do you want a puppy that is healthy?
2. Do you want a puppy that will have sound hips and elbows so that you won't have to potentially spend thousands of dollars on costly surgeries down the road (or euthanize the dog at an early age for crippling genetic diseases)?
3. Do you want a puppy that has a good temperament, that is not nervous or shy, that is confident meeting people?
4. Do you want a puppy that will be able to handle the stress of children, of company coming over, and of outings with your family (trips to the park, camping with friends, excursions to the beach, etc.)?
5. Do you want a puppy that you will be able to take out of the house to accompany you in public, that can mingle freely and confidently with guests in your home, that will have an agreeable temperament both at home and out in the normal world?
6. Do you want a puppy that has had a good start in life and has been raised by a good mother in a properly stimulating environment?
7. Do you want a puppy that will be intelligent and have the ability to be trained easily for house training, basic obedience, and good manners?
8. Do you want a puppy that will look like a German Shepherd, act like a German Shepherd, and possess all the traits that make a German Shepherd the marvelous dog that it is?



German Shepherds can make intelligent, courageous, highly-trainable, loyal, and energetic working companions. But if you only want one for a pet, is that "pet" GSD breeder really the best bet for finding a healthy, stable family companion?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, then you will be very, very hard-pressed to find a good puppy from a ‘breeder’ who simply breeds “pet” purebred, AKC-papered German Shepherd dogs that have done nothing but live on the property as pets, eating food and exchanging oxygen for carbon dioxide. This type of breeder is found in every town across the nation. He or she does not health-test their dogs for the genetic diseases that plague this breed (such as hip and elbow dysplasia, and degenerative myelopathy). He or she does not work their breeding dogs in any way, shape or form; he or she rarely—if ever—takes the dogs off their property (besides trips to the vet), and simply breeds for “companion dogs” without verifying that their German Shepherd Dogs actually are good German Shepherd Dogs, that in turn produce good dogs. They produce “pet puppies” without ever making sure that their breeding dogs a) are good representatives of the German Shepherd breed, and b) produce healthy, well-adjusted puppies of solid temperament and health that are also good representatives of the GSD breed.

In short, ‘breeders’ like this have done little to prove that their dogs look like, act like, and possess the qualities that make a German Shepherd Dog one of the most versatile and beloved dogs in the world. They have done nothing to ensure that their dogs have the proper temperament to be a good and stable companion who can handle the stress of everyday life, who can safely be taken into public, and who possess the courage and strength of temperament to defend its family (without treating every single person as if they were a threat—such dogs act as if they are being continually ‘hunted’: suspicious and nervous of everyone and everything). These ‘pet breeders’ have done little to prove that their dogs are free from basic genetic diseases that would get passed on to the puppies.

More often than not, these “breeders” have very little knowledge and experience of what a good, solid-tempered, stable working German Shepherd is. The breed founder himself—Max von Stephanitz—said that the GSD must always be a working dog first and foremost; it is the traits that make this breed a versatile and intelligent working dog that also make him a stable companion. For the German Shepherd breed, we cannot have one without the other, yet this is exactly what pet breeders have done. They have taken a breed that was bred for a wide variety of jobs, and turned it into a “pet only” type of dog. This calls into question the pet breeder’s ability to determine what a “good representative” of the GSD breed really is, if they have insisted on having one aspect without the other and lack an understanding of what the GSD is supposed to be! Not only do most pet breeders lack an understanding of proper German Shepherd temperament and working ability, but also of the genetic history behind their dogs, and of the true purpose and versatility of the German Shepherd Dog. When buyers have problems with their “pet puppies”, these breeders offer very little help, having limited experience and knowledge to draw from, displaying an inability to cope with the problems created through their “breeding program”.

Simply put, getting a “pet puppy” from this ‘breeder’ is an incredibly risky gamble in all important aspects of the puppy: health, temperament, trainability, structure, and more. Spending only a few hundred dollars now will not save you hundreds (even thousands) of dollars of vet bills and training bills later. It will not spare you the frustration of having a dog with a genetically weak temperament that is afraid of everyone, that has to be medicated during thunderstorms and fireworks, that cannot be taken anywhere in public because she is nervous and fearful at all times. Saving money by purchasing from a “pet breeder” will not spare you the heartache of having to euthanize a poorly-bred dog because of its nervous, reactive, fear-aggressive temperament, or because of inherited crippling hip dysplasia or degenerative myelopathy.

By and large, it is the temperament of these “pet dogs” that suffers the most. Without any effective temperament test and ability to objectively determine a dog’s temperament off its home turf, dogs with mediocre or even dangerous temperaments are bred repeatedly because they are “such wonderful pets”, and their puppies are passed off for a few hundred bucks as “pet quality puppies”. “Great with kids” and “good

with our family” are not temperament certifications or tests. “Defends her house and people” is not an objective description of whether or not the dog is strong, stable, and able to hold off a threat; most times, what people call “a protective dog” is a dog that is so scared of strangers and of changes in the environment that they growl and bark at anything and anyone that comes by. This dog is not a guard dog; this type of dog is a liability. This type of dog does not possess the strength of nerve and character that allows it to appropriately discriminate between friend and foe; it views everything and everyone as a threat, rather than displaying the innate confidence and aloofness that characterizes the German Shepherd Dog.

For the people looking for a pet German Shepherd Dog, temperament and health are of paramount importance. The last thing a family needs is a fearfully aggressive basket-case that has thin nerves and startles easily, that has an inability to cope with stress and the everyday environment around it, or that has a plethora of health problems ranging from constant hot spots to thyroid problems to crippling hip dysplasia. Most people looking for a pet dog are ill-equipped to deal with a dog with unstable temperament, dogs that therefore require special training and handling for the rest of their lives in order to help them simply cope with everyday, normal occurrences. This includes dogs that are terrified of strangers, or thunder, or vacuum cleaners, or only men; dogs who react aggressively to every little noise, to children, to guests invited in the home, to a spouse or close friend touching “their human”. These typically are all indications of poor temperament, a genetic trait that cannot truly be fixed no matter how much the dog is trained or socialized or desensitized. The [main elements of temperament](#) are genetic, and are then shaped by experiences with the world at large. Because the most important components of temperament are genetic, this means parents with poor temperaments will also produce puppies with poor temperaments (shyness, nervousness, too much sensitivity and reactivity), and no amount of socialization can correct a genetically-poor temperament. For the family pet, stable temperament is key, and it will only come from dogs whose temperaments have been truly evaluated, tested, and carefully matched together. This will rarely happen with the “pet breeders” who advertise their dogs only as “AKC papered purebred German Shepherd puppies” and breed only for ‘good companions’!

A healthy, happy, well-tempered puppy with a stable temperament, good nerves, and confidence must come from parents who possess these same traits—and that have been objectively TESTED for possessing these traits (**proven** to have this good temperament). Dogs cannot pass on to their puppies something they themselves do not possess! Additionally, how can a breeder whose dogs have never left the property or who have never been tested in any way—both for good health, hips, and elbows and for working ability and temperament—know if their dogs truly possess these traits? A dog that is in its home environment can be very different when it is taken out of the comfort and security of the familiar. Subjected to the stress of leaving the comfortable and familiar, many “pet quality” dogs show nervous, shy, and even fear-aggressive behavior—**none of which should be a characteristic of a good German Shepherd Dog!** How will you know if the puppy will be able to capably handle stress from its environment, strange people, etc. if the parents have never been shown to be capable of handling this stress either (without becoming shy, scared, nervous, defensive, etc.)?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions above, or “I’ll risk it”, then you are a gambler. If you are feeling lucky, then by all means go to the breeder who tests for nothing and simply breeds two dogs together with no knowledge of their genetic history or true temperaments. You might luck out and get a decent dog, but don’t be disappointed if the animal you get falls far short of your expectations, and leaves you regretting this decision for the rest of this dog’s life.

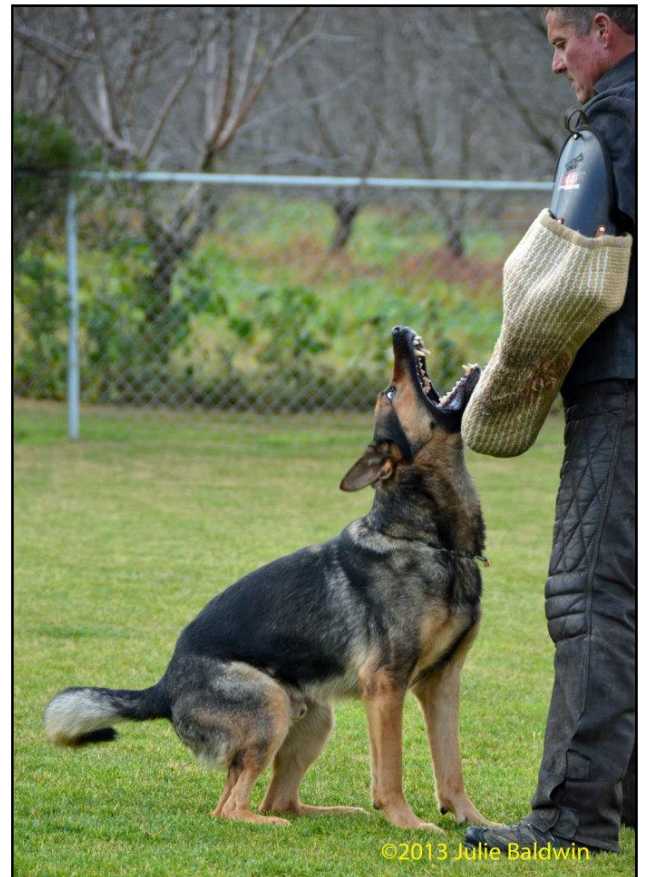


The test of Schutzhund/IPO has been helping test breeding dogs and helping preserve these valuable traits of solid temperament, easy trainability, intelligence, and courage for future generations since the near-beginning of the GSD breed.

While folks looking for “just a pet” may think that they do not need a dog with fancy IPO titles or other working titles in their pedigree, the reality is that the traits that characterize a good German Shepherd must be tested, selected for, and bred for in each generation of dogs. The test of Schutzhund/IPO has been helping test breeding dogs and helping preserve these valuable traits of solid temperament, easy trainability, intelligence, and courage for future generations since 1901 (only a few years after the start of the GSD). Good dogs do not just “happen”, and breeding for pets quickly results in a loss of valuable genetic traits in working breeds like the GSD. For healthy pups with stable temperament, do yourself, your family, and your future puppy a favor: look for a good breeder who works their dogs, tests their dogs for both temperament and basic genetic health (hips, elbows, DM). For more information on what characteristics you should look for in a good breeder, please see the article: [“What Characterizes a Good Breeder?”](#)

Best of luck to you in your search for a good German Shepherd puppy! I truly hope that you support the good and conscientious breeders who are working tirelessly to test their dogs, breed good dogs, and preserve this marvelous breed for future generations. Trust me—they are not in it for the money; they are in it for the love of the German Shepherd Dog.

GERMAN SHEPHERD: The same dog that does *this*:



Should also be able to do this:



THAT is the well-bred, balanced German Shepherd Dog that makes a great family companion.