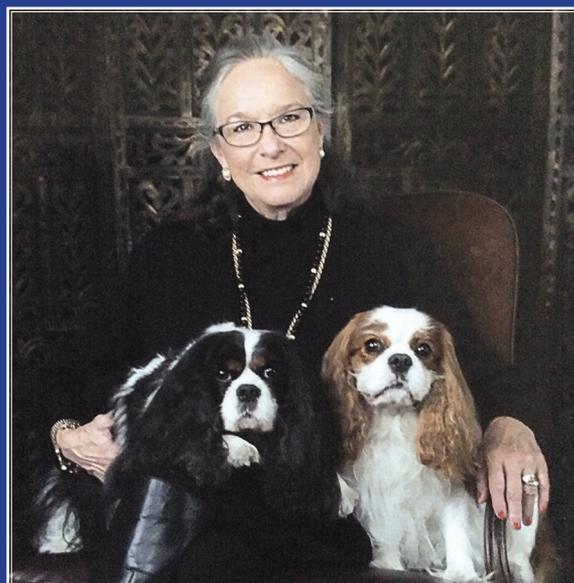


Selecting and Developing the Best Show Dog Puppy!

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There are many requisites that go into making a successful “show dog.” For the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, that means the constant tail wag, open smile, and happy expression; his heart is in it from the time he enters the ring until he happily exits—he is enjoying the overall experience. There are some, of course, that are born a natural showman, and everyone knows it when they see the jaunty, look-at-me trot around the ring. It seems that the dog knows it too!

Every handler has their requirements in defining a “show dog,” but let’s start with the basics. Besides the obvious good breeding, solid conformation, good nutrition, grooming, and training, there is another equally important component: emotional soundness. Without it, the dog show career will quickly end in frustration for both the handler and dog. The adage, “you can’t make an apple and orange,” comes to mind, and you can’t make them “want to want to.”

Temperament v. Personality

a.k.a. nature v. nurture (Know the difference; Both evolved differently!)

Temperament is based on genetics, is innate, and is the natural way of responding to the environment, i.e., nature. Temperament is the foundation of the personality.

Personality is how our temperament (genetics) interacts with the environment, i.e., nurture. Personality traits are present at an early age, are relatively stable over time, and the same response should be expected in future similar situations, throughout the dog’s life. (Segurson)

Svartberg and Forkman Personality Trait Study list specific traits that are evolutionarily stable and are heritable. They are:

- Playfulness
- Curiosity/Fearlessness
- Chase Proneness
- Sociability and Aggressiveness
- Shyness and Boldness

Shyness is one of the behavior traits most affected by genetics, (Pfaffenberger) so look closely at mom and dad! You need to know, up front, what you are getting when you are selecting the show dog prospect. Time and love can cure a lot

of problems but not a potential genetic emotionally unsound dog. The expectations for the show ring competitor are very different from the companionable lap dog.

Emotional Soundness

In addition to the Svartberg and Forkman Personality Traits, your checklist should include the following questions. Does the puppy:

- Freely establish eye contact and enjoy human touch?
- Accept novel stimuli?
- Handle frustration?
- Recover easily from being startled and is quick to forgive?
- Have a natural curiosity?
- Respond to play overtures spontaneously?
- Enjoy and seek human companionship?

This sounds like the description of the Cavalier doesn’t it?

The criteria for selecting the best show prospect should be an objective observational approach. There are no guarantees, but if you select a dog that passes the following test, your chances are greatly increased. Although there is no way to know if they will thrive in the dog show environment, you sure can be guaranteed the odds of success diminish if they fail these simple tests. Be aware of rationalizations such as, “oh she just takes a little time to warm up” or similar statements. Dogs communicate in a straightforward and honest manner, what you see is what you get. After the initial observation the next step in this process is the temperament test.

Temperament tests measure:

- Positive emotions such as sociability, stability, confidence, and friendliness.
- Negative emotions such as fearfulness, shyness, anxiety, and aggression.
- The dog’s behavioral response using an objective description of the behavior rather than a subjective interpretation or rationalizations of the dog’s behavior. Therefore, the breeder is automatically disqualified from performing the test.

If the puppy is old enough to leave its littermates, it is old enough to be tested. A quiet, but neutral, environment with a neutral tester is ideal. There are many temperament tests available to the breeder. Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ), Safety Assessment for Evaluation Rehoming (SAFER), and The Volhard Puppy Aptitude Test are three excellent choices and easy to administer. These are self-explanatory and can be easily found with a Google search.

Critical Periods of Development

Scott and Fuller, psychologists summarized in their classic 13-year study in their book, *Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog* (1965), the foundation for critical periods in the puppy. This was one of the first and most extensive research studies on dogs and due to their “discovery” of the critical periods in the puppy, became the foundation in developmental studies in the human.

They found that from birth to the 16th week that even a small exposure from a specific experience could greatly affect the dog for life. The younger the puppy the more significant of an impact on the puppy. The first year can be divided into three periods:

- I. Neonatal: (3-16 days)
- II. Socialization: (4-14 weeks)
 - Canine –Canine Socialization (3-7 weeks)
 - Canine-Human Socialization Period (7-12 weeks)
 - Fear Impact Period (8-11 weeks)
- III. Enrichment: (14-52 weeks)

What is the puppy’s enrichment program? What experiences has the puppy been exposed to? When you bring your puppy home, you have until the 16th week to maximize optimal emotional growth that builds a lifelong emotional and social foundation.

Enrichment: The 4 E’s:

- Explore
- Examine/Seek
- Encounter
- Experience

The 4 E’s will be experiences that form the foundation for all other learning, each building on top of each other until the world becomes a safe and predictable place to live and explore. The result is a nonplused, poised, confident puppy.

Unfortunately, a majority of puppies (regardless if they are being primed for the show ring or not) do not receive this advantage. You can tell as early as 12 weeks those who have a head start and those who have not. These puppies may not necessarily end up with emotional problems later in life, but they certainly will not develop into their full potential. The puppy raised in a kennel environment, especially Cavaliers, do not fare well down the road as compared with the puppy started in an enrichment program. Raising puppies in a lackluster routine also puts a puppy at a disadvantage that can be difficult, if not impossible to overcome. For those who missed their window of opportunity during their critical period either due to neglect, isolation, lack of socialization of human and/or dog can find

themselves in rescues, shelters, or in more dire situations. So often, the consequences do not manifest until the dog is 18 months to 2 years of age. It is not uncommon, then, to hear about being surprised at the sudden behavior change in “my normally sweet dog.” Multiple intra-species and inter-species experiences are a must for building confidence and developing an emotionally sound dog. As many cross-species experiences as possible should take place during the puppy’s first 16 weeks. Cross species social interactions or “meets and greets” build sociability and increase confidence as well as the ability to adapt to multiple changes in the environment.

Sue Sternberg defines sociable as the dog’s, “innate affection for reference, and attraction toward humans” and socialized as the dogs, “early exposure to novel stimuli.” For those puppies that have been properly socialized the benefits range from positive behaviors such as:

- Comfortable in new environments
- Communicates well with both dogs and human
- Can ignore nonthreatening stimuli
- Is social and anxious free
- To negative behaviors such as:
 - Anxiety
 - Aggressive
 - Lacks bite inhibition
 - Dog - dog aggression
 - Fearful of anything new, including animals, people, and events

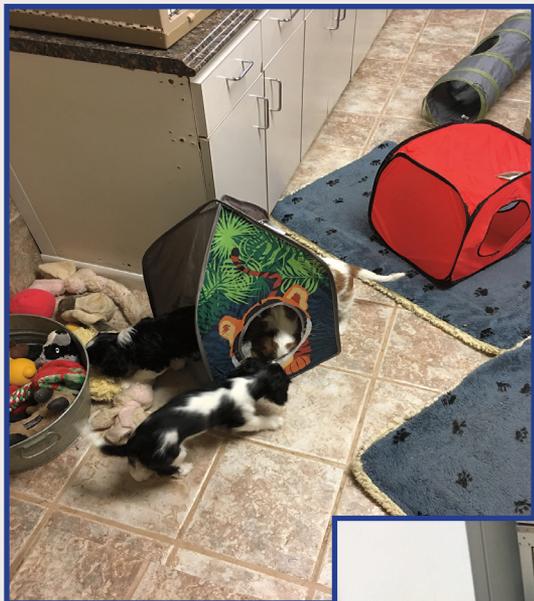
A practical example is the startle reflex. An emotionally healthy dog, after being startled, will approach and forgive the offending source. Are they curious? Do they approach novel stimuli? Seek human contact immediately? “She just hates loud noises” and “after all this is a new environment” are subjective statements and should be a red flag in the assessment.

Since the puppy will be spending up to 9-12 weeks with the breeder and the round of vaccines are not complete, the 4 E’s will have to be “in house.” There is a lot that can be done, though, to expose the puppy while keeping it safe. Exploring or seeking is one that the dog will need to continue for life - it is mentally stimulating, builds confidence, and physically strengthening. The best way to accomplish this is taking the dog on a smell-the-roses walk and for a puppy, an opportunity to explore outside the nursery, daily.

For indoor enrichment, puppy gyms and enrichment/interactive toys are available on the Internet, and different types of footing with multiple textures are easy to accomplish. Create a playroom with multiple toys, shapes, sizes, and sounds. Have as many friends over (young and old) as possible and hopefully there are other household dogs that can come into the nursery for a visit. Taking the puppies on car rides around the block is a fabulous way to start experiencing the movement of the car. Take a few minutes a day to just “be” with each puppy individually. Whether it is playtime (never too young to start teaching fetch) or cuddling, one on one is extremely beneficial for you both!

Once the little one has left the nursery (keeping in mind the 4 E’s) start the program I call, “one-a-day”, (like the vitamin). If you miss one you will live (and life will surely get in the way of the best laid plans) but unlike the vitamin, if a day is missed, you

Many puppy gyms can be resourced/repurposed from garage sales or DIY projects. Indoor and outdoor experiences are necessary. Here are some photos from the home of Margaret Clayton, Royalcaper Cavaliers, Brownwood, TX. Note the multiple floor textures, things to explore, multi-level surfaces, etc.



can double up. You can offer more than one new experience a day, just as long as you don't overwhelm the little one. Just because you are not exposing them to general public venues or other dogs until the vaccines are complete does not mean that they have to be kept isolated. Going to the bank, a drive thru restaurant where strangers can pet them, sitting on a bench at the mall, visiting nursing homes, schools, riding in elevators, hotel lobbies, having two and four legged friends over, walking to the neighbor's house and making introductions, exposure to the vacuum cleaner and the UPS truck all can be done safely. The advantage is that you can carry a Cavalier or wheel them in a buggy where they are kept safe, physically and emotionally. You are only limited by your imagination!

Staying below threshold

All of this is well and good if done correctly. The little one must always be kept under threshold and never in a situation where he can't retreat, get rescued, or removed. He must never be left in a situation to "figure" it out or with the attitude "he will get over it." If they are showing any signs of stress, anxiety,

or fear, i.e., over threshold, they must be removed calmly and quickly as possible. Be aware of rationalizations such as: "oh, it's not that bad" or "she'll get used to it." Learn to "listen with your eyes" by being aware of the dog's calming signals and respond appropriately. Calming signals are telling us that all is not well. There are approximately thirty. Some common ones are: licking of nose, head turning, sniffing, freezing and yawning. (Rugass, pg. ix). Keep each new experience natural, flowing from one event to the other, thus building on their original 4 E foundation.

Spending their first 16 weeks learning that the world is a safe place, they should be emotionally and physically secure. Multiple positive experiences as early as possible under threshold can help in creating the ideal show dog. Multiple negative experiences as early as possible over threshold can affect the dog's confidence, create anxiety, and if stressful enough, can be permanent.

Training

Training begins in the nursery by learning daily life skills, handling, going outside, grooming, leash walking, just to name



a few, and develops into something more formal involving impulse control, frustration tolerance exercises, and learning how to solve problems. However, formal training cannot begin until the dog can focus on you. Attention is the first step in any training. Creating a “lifeline” is essential in the attention training process. It is a visual and emotional connection between dog and pet parent. Does the dog look to you in a new situation? Check in with you when he needs something? Does he look to you for guidance in new situations or on walks? Or does she just go about her business in her sweet merry way? What happens when you don’t have a lifeline? What happens when you do? The “watch me” exercise is an excellent first step, teaching eye contact, impulse control, and focus. While holding the food bowl waist high before each meal ask for a “watch me” with eye contact (not watching the bowl or your hand). Wait as long as you think they can continue the eye-to-eye contact and give them their food just before it becomes too much. Don’t let them fail. Do this with each feeding and slowly increase the duration of the eye to eye contact. The “watch me” exercise is the first step in any type of training.

Summary

Dogs communicate with humans in an honest and straightforward manner, but we have to listen with our eyes and our hearts. If they are happy “showing,” you will know it. If they are not, listen to them and find something more fun for you both to do together. Your relationship is more important

and should be guarded with all of the love and care you can give.

Responsible breeding is the foundation for behavior, health, temperament and longevity. Add nutrition, medical, environmental enrichment, training, handling, and grooming. Mix with a creative first 16 weeks including both intra-species and inter-species socialization and the result should be an emotionally sound Cavalier ready to take on the world!



Melissa McMath Hatfield, MS, CBCC-KA, CDBC, earned a master’s in counseling psychology and is a retired licensed psychological examiner. She is a Certified Canine Behavior Consultant. Her mission is to enhance the human-dog relationship through understanding, knowledge, and empathy. Currently, she has a private consulting practice where her focus is performing temperament assessments with behavior modification protocols for dogs who are exhibiting mental health issues such as aggression, anxiety, fearfulness, or any other behavior that interferes with the dog’s quality of life and the human-canine relationship.

She is a professional member and has been published in both the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants’ IAABC and Journal and the Association of Professional Dog Trainers’ APDT and Chronicle of the Dog. She was nominated for the Dog Writers Association of America award for their 2018 writing competition: Magazine Article, Behavior or Training category.

For further information please go to her website: www.lovingdogs.net.