**Questions to Ask The Breeder**

\_\_\_\_1) Where did you find out about this breeder? Responsible breeders will breed only when they have a waiting list of puppy buyers. They don't ever find it necessary to advertise in newspapers, websites such as CraigsList, or with a sign out in the front yard.   
  
\_\_\_\_2) Do both the sire and dam have CHIC (Canine Health Information Center) numbers? A CHIC number requires minimum health screenings: hip, elbow, eye, and thyroid.  
a)       Do both parents (the sire and dam) have either good or excellent hip clearances from the OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) or PennHip scores close to or less than 0.30? Ask to see the certificates. "My vet okayed the hips/ x-ray" is not a valid clearance.   
b)     Do both parents have normal OFA Elbow readings? OFA Elbow screening evaluates for elbow dysplasia such as ununited anconeal process, fragmented coronoid process, osteochondrosis, or any combination thereof.  
c)      Do both parents have current eye clearances from CERF (Canine Eye Registration Foundation)? CERF examinations screen for heritable eye diseases.   
d)     Do both parents have normal OFA Thyroid screenings? OFA Thyroid testing detects autoimmune thyroiditis, as well as idiopathically reduced thyroid function. Autoimmune thyroiditis is known to be a heritable thyroid condition.   
e)   Do both parents have normal OFA Degenerative Myelopathy\* (DM) screenings? OFA DM testing is a DNA test that can indicate an increased risk of DM, a debilitating, degernerative spinal disease.  
f)     Additional screenings\*\* that may be reported to the Canine Health Foundation through OFA are:  
   BAER (Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response) which tests for auditory issues (such as deafness)   
   Cardiac certification\* (Congenital Cardiac Database) through cardiac auscultation, echocardiography with Doppler, or cardiac catheterization with   
            angiocardiography, congenital cardiac issues can be detected.   
\*Recommended for Ridgebacks, as well as other breeds.   
\*\*Other additional screenings are applicable to other breeds; to find this information, please visit: <http://offa.org/>.  
  
\_\_\_\_3) Are both parents at least 2 years old? Final OFA hip and elbow clearances cannot be obtained before that age. (Because PennHip evaluations are a different type of evaluation to OFA, they can be done as early as 4 months of age.) Be suspicious of dogs bred before all health clearances can be completed and before the dog's temperament as an adult is known. A scrupulous breeder is not in a hurry to breed, but takes time to evaluate their bitch's strengths and weaknesses, and choose an appropriate sire.  
  
\_\_\_\_4) Do all four grandparents, siblings of the parents and any other puppies they may have produced have hip, elbow, CERF (eye), and thyroid evaluations? A responsible breeder will keep track of these statistics and openly discuss any problems that have occurred in the lines and what has been done to prevent them from reoccurring.   
  
\_\_\_\_5) How often is the dam bred? If the dam is bred on consecutive estrus cycles and the breeder can give you an educated explanation for this, you needn’t be as skeptical of this breeder. However, if no “good” explanation can be given, it may indicate that profit is the primary motive for the frequency of breeding.  
  
\_\_\_\_6) Is the breeder willing to provide you with references and telephone numbers of other people who have purchased puppies from them?   
  
\_\_\_\_7) Do all puppies placed as pets registered with limited AKC registration and required to be spayed/neutered? A breeder who cares enough about the breed to insist on these is likely to be a responsible breeder.   
  
\_\_\_\_8) On what basis was the sire chosen? If the answer is "because he lives right down the street" or "because he is really sweet", sufficient thought was not put into the breeding.   
  
\_\_\_\_9) WILL THE BREEDER TAKE THE DOG BACK AT ANY TIME, FOR ANY REASON, IF YOU CANNOT KEEP IT?! This is the hallmark of responsible breeding (and the quickest way to make rescue obsolete).   
  
\_\_\_\_10) Is there a written guarantee against congenital health or temperament problems? Do they offer another puppy or your money back, not require you to return your puppy or euthanize it? Many unscrupulous breeders will honor a guarantee only after the original puppy has been destroyed or ask for the puppy to be returned to them in order to have it euthanized. Though this may be the humane answer to the current puppy’s issues, it is your puppy and your decision. Your breeder (much like your veterinarian) should only offer suggestions, never require you to make a decision that isn’t right for you or makes you uncomfortable.  
  
\_\_\_\_11) Will the breeder be available to answer any question you might have for the life of the dog? Is this someone you would feel comfortable asking any type of question at any hour of the day or night?   
  
\_\_\_\_12) Is the breeder knowledgeable about the breed? Is he or she involved in competition with their dogs (agility, rally, obedience, lure coursing, and/ or conformation)? And for how many years have they been involved with the breed?  
  
\_\_\_\_13) Are there a majority of titled dogs (the initials: CH, OTCH, CD, JC, SC, etc.- before and/ or after the names) in the first three generations of ALL their breeding animals? (The term ‘champion lines’ means nothing if those titles are back three, four, or more generations or there is only one or two in the whole pedigree.)  
  
\_\_\_\_14) Are the sire and dam available for you to meet? If the sire is unavailable can you call his owners or people who have other of his offspring to ask about temperament or health problems? (You should be able to request at any time and certainly, be provided at the time of purchase: pictures or videos, a three or more generation pedigree, and health certification numbers of both the sire and dam.)   
  
\_\_\_\_15) Have the puppies been raised in the home - not in a barn, kennel, the basement, garage, or the backyard?   
  
\_\_\_\_16) Is the breeder knowledgeable about raising puppies, critical neonatal periods, proper socialization techniques, etc.? Puppies that are raised without ample exposure to gentle handling, human contact and a wide variety of noises and experiences OR are removed from their dam before she is ready (usually between 6 and 8 weeks of age) or removed from their littermates before 10 to 12 weeks, may exhibit a wide variety of behavioral problems!  
  
\_\_\_\_17) Does the breeder provide you with registration papers, a contract to sign, copies of all clearances and guarantees, health records and material to help you with feeding, socializing, training and housebreaking AT the time of sale?   
  
\_\_\_\_18) Have the puppies' temperaments been evaluated and can the breeder guide you to the puppy that will best suit your lifestyle? A very shy puppy will not do well in a noisy household with small children, just as a very dominant puppy won't flourish in a sedate, senior citizen household. A caring breeder will know the puppies and be able to guide you towards the puppy that will best fit your family and lifestyle.   
  
\_\_\_\_19) Do the puppies seem healthy, with no discharge from eyes or nose, no loose stools, no foul smelling ears? Are their coats soft and clean? Do they have plenty of energy when awake? Are their nails trimmed (preferably with dewclaws removed and the incision sites well healed by the time you visit with them)?  
  
\_\_\_\_20) Are the puppies current and up-to-date with their vaccine series and vet checked? (When a puppy is placed at an ideal 10 to 12 weeks of age, they should have 2 vaccinations on board; over 12 weeks, 3 vaccines; and over 16 weeks, 4 vaccines and their puppy series should be complete except for their Rabies vaccine which needs to be administered by your veterinarian and then registered with your county before 6 months of age.) No puppy from a good, clean environment should ever have worms or external parasites (fleas, ticks, ear mites, etc.). Even if a puppy is not sent home with any of these problems, did the breeder need to treat the puppies for any of these issues? If so, things may not be as clean or healthy as you think!  
  
\_\_\_\_21) Does the breeder have only 1 or at most 2 breeds of dogs and only 1 litter at a time? If there are several breeds of dogs, chances are the breeder cannot devote the time it takes to become extremely knowledgeable about the breed; and if there is more than one litter at a time it is very difficult to give the puppies the attention they need and may indicate that the primary purpose for breeding is profit, rather than a sincere desire to improve the breed.  
  
\_\_\_\_22) Does the breeder belong to their breed's parent club or a regional breed club? For Ridgebacks, the national parent club is the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of the United States (RRCUS). Members of RRCUS are held to a Code of Ethics that protects both the breeder as well as you the puppy purchaser. (Please visit the RRCUS website to view the RRCUS Code of Ethics: http://www.rrcus.org/assets/html/about/code.pdf)  
  
\_\_\_\_23) Do you feel comfortable with this person? After all, you are entering into a decade (plus) long relationship. If after talking to a breeder you feel intimidated or pressured… keep looking!

**Questions to Ask Yourself**

Are you prepared to...  
  
\_\_\_\_1) Take full responsibility for this dog and all its needs for the next 10 to 15+ years? This is NOT a task that can be left to children!  
  
\_\_\_\_2) Invest the considerable time, money and patience it takes to train a dog to be a good companion? (This does not happen by itself!!!!) A responsible owner is willing to start a puppy in a Kindergarten class before he/ she reaches 6 months of age and continue in classes until the puppy has reached 24 months of age. This is generally only 3 or 4- 6 to 8 week classes a year but can mean the difference between a lifelong relationship and an impossible puppy who gets dumped at a shelter or returned to the breeder! Look for good local obedience clubs in your area BEFORE getting your new puppy. Not all areas have such facilities, so expect to drive some distance if necessary. Make the commitment NOW to help your puppy be all it can be!  
  
\_\_\_\_3) Always keep the dog safe: no running loose, riding in the back of an open pickup truck, being chained outside, etc.?  
  
\_\_\_\_4) Make sure the dog gets enough attention and exercise? (Though Ridgebacks are fairly sedate in the house, the do need several hours of exercise every day!)  
  
\_\_\_\_5) Live with shedding, excitability, and high activity for the next 10-15 years.  
  
\_\_\_\_6) Spend the money it takes to provide proper veterinary care including but certainly not limited to: vaccines, heartworm testing and preventative, spaying or neutering, annual check-ups, daily and annual dental care (some Ridgebacks do have bad teeth), and annual blood screening for your geriatric (6+) Ridgeback?  
  
\_\_\_\_7) Become educated about the proper care of a Ridgeback, correct training methods and how to groom? (There are many good books available, invest the time to read a few.)  
  
\_\_\_\_8) Keep the breeder informed and up to date on the dog’s accomplishments as well as any problems? (Remember, breeders love the annual pictures and updates throughout the year, not just at Christmas! And problems should be brought to the breeder’s attention as soon as possible, no matter the age of your dog.)  
  
\_\_\_\_9) Take your questions to the breeder or other appropriate professional before they become problems that are out of hand?   
  
\_\_\_\_10) Have the patience to accept (and enjoy) the trials of puppyhood, which can last for several years, and each stage afterward?   
  
\_\_\_\_11) Continue to accept responsibility for the dog despite inevitable life changes such as new babies, kids going off to school, moving, or returning to work?  
  
\_\_\_\_12) Resist impulse buying, instead have the patience to make a responsible choice?  
  
If you answered yes to ALL of the above, you are ready to start contacting breeders. Start early because most responsible breeders have a waiting list ranging from a few of months to a couple of years. Remember, the right puppy or adult dog IS worth waiting for!!