

Don't Believe Everything You See on the Internet

(as printed in AKC Gazette, Mar 2000 Miniature Pinscher Breed Column, courtesy of: Faith Gordon).

I have come across several Web sites that are designed to gloss over the ugliness of the business of the mass production and distribution of puppies, and I feel that I should share some of what I found.

One such business is located in Missouri and claims to be "the largest supplier of pets in the world, by far." This company claims to have 10 drivers hauling dogs from Missouri to pet stores on the East and West coasts, and they also ship puppies by air to South America, Europe and Japan. The company claims to move 900 puppies per week, all between 8 and 10 weeks old. They produce puppies under two kennel names that I am aware of, and these names have figured predominantly in all AKC papers of pet-store puppies whose registrations I have requested to see.

It should be noted that this company's puppies of breeds such as the Miniature Pinscher already have their ears cropped at this young age; one can only imagine how small and tiny those babies were when they had their ears done and how they had them done.

With approximately 230 puppies per trailer load, two employees drive around the clock. The company's information on the Web site claims that the drivers stop every four to five hours to monitor the puppies in their trailer, but somehow I don't see a puppy-hauler stopping for long periods when trying to make a delivery in as short a time as possible.

One driver comments that a drawback to the job is the pungent odor that fills the trailer. "The smell takes a little getting used to," the driver admits. The trailers are designed with ramps that collect all the puppy waste and channel it into two 200-gallon tanks, which the drivers empty at a truck stop.

This caught me by surprise -; I had assumed that each puppy was in its own secure crate, with its own food and water bowls and lots of fluffy clean blankets to snuggle in. Now I visualize lots of open-bottom wire cages with many puppies urinating and defecating in each one, and no place in the cage to curl up and rest except on feces-covered wire. This must be quite a sight; I shudder to imagine how the long-coat puppies look after the trip. I imagine the smell must be terrible. I doubt these are clean, cuddly, bouncy balls of fluff being unloaded from the trucks at pet stores. And I doubt that the pet stores would want potential customers to see these puppies straight from the truck! On top of the stress this mode of transport has on the puppies, add the stress of just having been taken from their moms and litter mates.

I make it a point to keep in touch with some of the local veterinarians to monitor the health problems of Min Pins in my area and to track where sick dogs were purchased. Pet stores are usually the source, and the complaint I hear from the vets all the time is, "When are people going to learn not to buy these dogs?"

I would like to do a little comparison. I recently raised a litter of Min Pin puppies and kept them in a huge whelping box in my very clean home. Before leaving for work each day, I thoroughly cleaned the puppy area and lined it with a thick layer of unprinted newspaper. The papers had probably already been cleaned eight times that morning, in the time from when I started getting ready for work until I left. The box also held a mid-sized crate (with the door open) with clean blankets in it for the puppies to sleep on.

As I came right home from work each evening, I could tell I had puppies in the house as soon as I put my key in the door. They always had turned their puppy playpen into a mess and would be busy jumping up and down in it while expressing their joy at seeing me. It took me a good half-hour every time to swoop up dirty papers, lay down clean ones, pick the new mess off the fresh papers, get their food and water, pick up papers once again, and replace the bedding in the crate. During all this, I also wiped off messed little paws. Add to this the mopping, disinfecting and constant washing and bleaching of puppy blankets.

All this work for five little, short-haired Min Pin puppies! Also, my babies are always within my visual range while I am home, and I am constantly cleaning their area. And just think of how this work is multiplied for a litter of 15 large-breed puppies.

Now think of how much should be done to properly care for 230 puppies -; 230 very young, very stressed babies.

How amazing that people will pay a high price for a pet-store puppy when one little phone call to the AKC at (919) 233-9767 can get you in touch with breed club referrals, which provide potential pet owners with the names of responsible, ethical breeders from whom they can purchase wonderfully healthy dogs. What's more, these puppies are accompanied with guarantees and with breeders who will "be there" for them for years after the sale -all for hundreds (or even thousands) of dollars less than the pet shop.

The Internet has provided puppy mills with the means to whitewash their image. And, unfortunately, a large portion of the population and potential pet owners will probably buy into this.

These businesses count on the trusting public to believe what they read. In a sense, I am asking the same of you. You are reading this magazine to learn about purebred dogs. Do your homework, and keep your own standards of care and breeding above reproach. Most of all, spread awareness. The educated and informed consumer is our best customer!