

# **Littermates –**

## **Don't be Tempted To Keep Two**

**By Norma Simpson Rust**

Ideally the time to select or purchase your pup is 7 weeks, however by 10 weeks it is imperative to separate the puppies. Over the past twenty years I talked to people every week who had littermates and wanted to sign up for Puppy Class with them. I felt obligated to mention what a difficult task they were facing.

They were always amazed that I could describe their pups' behavior without seeing them in action. Invariably one of the pups becomes a bully, the other a wimp. Life with these pups is one big wrestling match. They become neurotically attached to each other and when separated neither one of them will have any confidence. Unfortunately, I could probably count on one hand the people that made the decision to sell or place one of the pups as a result of my advice.

A Veterinarian signed up for Puppy Class with two pups that were to become hunting dogs. When I saw that he had paid for two pups I called him and discussed the problems incurred with littermate behaviors. As it is necessary to separate them as much as possible, I suggested that he bring one the first week and the other one the second week, alternating through the six- week class. This would allow each pup to be with him by itself and able to spend bonding time and training time without competition. He stated that he had already arranged for his wife and son to come to class to train the second puppy. He wanted to continue with his original plan and I reluctantly agreed to go along with it. Throughout the first class the pup that he was handling was able to function somewhat normally. The puppy that his wife and son were working with, however, would only cower and shake. It was too frightened to even take a treat. The doctor was convinced that this was because he wasn't handling that puppy in class. He decided to handle that puppy the next week and have his wife work with the more confident puppy. He quickly realized that when they exchanged puppies his presence made little or no difference to the cowardly pup. This convinced him to make the decision to separate them. He was uniquely dedicated to adhering to the separation of the two puppies and had the facilities to do so at his Clinic. He was able to take

one of the pups to work with him every day, leaving the other at home. He continued to train them and obtained a Canine Good Citizen Title on the most confident one. He later told me that a friend of his purchased two puppies out of this same litter. This friend kept them in a pen in his backyard until they were 8 or 9 months old. He then decided to start training them but found it to be an impossible task. This shared experience convinced each of them to never again have two puppies at the same time. The Veterinarian, recognizing the value of puppy training subsequently sent every owner that came into his Clinic to our Puppy Classes.

I need to point out at this time the most wonderful thing about Puppy Training is that all breeds are equally trainable from 8-16 weeks. It doesn't matter what breed it is, all puppies are on equal ground for behavior shaping and training during this period of their lives. However, if your pup spends all of its time with other dogs or a littermate it will bond to dogs and not people and never gain the socialization skills it needs to function confidently in life.

An example of this occurred recently in my Puppy Class. A lady with a fourteen-week old Boxer came to class and her puppy wouldn't even look at her the first night. In the Behavior Shaping segment of the class she was showing the pup treats but it was only interested in getting to the other pups.

We tried different treats and nothing worked.

Later in the class I asked the question, do any of you have other dogs? At this time I caution the class to keep their pups separated from their grown dogs and the reasons that it is so important the puppy not be left unattended in the company of adult dogs. First and most important of all the puppy could be seriously injured or killed. Second, the puppy would bond to dogs and not be interested in human interactions. The owner of the Boxer said that her puppy was spending all of her time out in the backyard with three adult dogs. After the problems were explained she kept the puppy separated from the other dogs and by the next week her puppy was working for treats and became the star of the class.

I recently had a woman in a Beginning Class with a tiny white poodle that was about three years old. He would bite without provocation or warning. He had grown up with his mother and a littermate. He was very insecure and this kind of idiopathic aggression is very unpredictable. Imagine when this happens with large breeds like Pit Bulls or Rottweilers. How scary is that situation? Some people do recognize the source of their dog's behavior once it is pointed out to them. A woman recently came into my place of business to talk about

training her male unaltered Pit Bull that she couldn't take for a walk because he kept aggressing every dog he saw. As she talked, she mentioned having had a male littermate who had already been placed in another home because of their constant fighting. When I asked her if she realized that fear could be the cause of this aggressive behavior I saw a light come on, and she knew what the problem was. His behavior was purely due to his lack of confidence. A conscientious Breeder would never place two puppies in the same house if they had any idea of the outcome of this action.

In conclusion, every dog, whether we intend to show in Breed, Obedience, Agility, or simply want a good house pet will have a much better chance of success if it is confident and outgoing. The vital socialization that is required to insure this result is virtually impossible to achieve if littermates are raised together.

Jae-Mar-S recommends that puppies be at least 8 weeks old before they are removed from their litter so they can learn "dog language and manners" from their mother and siblings