

How to Evaluate a Litter

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I want to say thank you to my guest columnist this month, Gloria Knapp of Chateau Acres. Chateau Acres is one of the top breeders of Min Pins, having produced and finished many Champions and Best in Show Winners. As of this writing, the current #1 Min Pin, "Ch Chateau Acres High and Mighty" is owned and bred by Gloria Knapp. #1 for '94 and '95 was Ch. Chateau Acres Flackey Jake, also bred by Gloria Knapp.

The first step to grading a litter is before they are born. If you start with a top quality Champion bitch who has no outstanding faults and breed her to a Champion male of equal or better quality, you are starting out ahead of the game. You have also researched the pedigree on the "would be" litter. Dogs you are not personally familiar with in the pedigree you have asked other knowledgeable breeders about. You have already prepared for a perfect match in your head and on paper. Now for the results.

The next step is at birth. While the puppies are still wet, I hold them up and examine their outline. At this time you can see shoulder layback, rear angulation and length of back and neck. Length of tail before it is docked can sometimes give you an idea on size. I feel the bones in the face and the chin to get an idea of skull formation and length of muzzle. For the first 8 weeks there isn't a lot of change in structure but you start noticing size differences. At 8-12 weeks the growth bone is evident and you can get a better idea on size. With a size disqualification in our breed, now is the time to pet out the ones that look like they won't make size.

I start stacking my puppies at around 4-5 weeks with lots of petting and positive reinforcement. This is when you notice shortness of back, length of neck and angulation. It's still too early for any serious decisions, but the puppies are getting used to the fun experience of being handled. By the ninth week, they've had 2 shots and are ready for lead work. They have already been on a light toy lead every time they have been picked up and played with, so they are used to having something hang around their necks. Now it's time for the flexi-lead and bait. When the bucking and whirling is over I say their name and with the first ever so slight acknowledgment comes a treat. In no time at all they are having a ball and enjoying the lead. This is where we can make some serious decisions based on temperament. There are some puppies who just plain want to be a pet. They are quieter and more laid back. They like to be in your lap instead of out at the end of the lead. So be it. You have produced a very pretty pet.

Now let's say we have 2 or 3 puppies that look like they will stay in size, they've lost their baby fat, and they look good coming and going; those angles we saw at birth are coming together real nice and there is a nice hackney-like action with a level topline in profile. Now comes show temperament. If a puppy doesn't think it's a winner, it won't be. Look for the one that says, "Look at me, I'm Special!" He's fearless, he's proud and he's full of energy. He is your pick.

Training is essential in raising good puppies. With Min Pins, a lot of it is subliminal but it is definitely done always with positive reinforcement and everything is fun. You cannot fairly evaluate an untrained dog.