

# A MATCH MADE IN PET HEAVEN

Choosing a pet is similar to choosing the right partner. You'll want one that will best suit your lifestyle and personality. Kerry Dimmer explores unusual and exotic pet options that could be considered your ideal match.

You're ready to commit. Finally, a chance to find the one who will understand you completely, who will always be there for you in a time of crisis, who will never betray you, who will listen without interruption, who will obey and acquiesce to your every command. And all you'll have to do in return is feed them, love them, and ... well, clean up their poop!

"Looks," you recall your mother saying, "aren't everything," or this timeless classic: "you can't judge a book by its cover." What I'm referring to is personality, so less we be considered fickle we're going to have to ignore the candidate's yellow-stained teeth, the scratching of nether-regions, halitosis, and questionable hygiene.

But let's get back to pets! Choosing the right pet for your personality is vital because you're going to get something from your pet that you won't get from any other human being, and no, I'm not referring to rabies or salmonella. I'm talking about a lifetime of guaranteed loyalty, and a total commitment to love, obey and honor you.

So just before you start trawling the web for your best pet, have a long hard think about the type of person you are, your lifestyle, your habits, and your needs. Here are a few ideas for choosing a pet based on your personality:

- If you are the type of person who likes to stay up all night reading the Who's Who, then an owl is the perfect pet for you.
- If you are paranoid, thinking everyone is out to get you, consider a tarantula or scorpion.
- If you lead a sedentary life, have short legs, and are prone to obesity, a potbellied pig will compliment your lifestyle.
- If you are self-centered, independent, and snooty, a cat will make the perfect pet companion.
- Do you get under people's skin easily? You'll make a great flea owner.
- Are you the sun-loving type with dry, scaly skin? Lizards are the best pet for you.
- Bi-polar? Try a chameleon.
- Do people consider you an insufferable bore, a 'squeeze-the-life' out of everything kind of person? Consider a python.
- Do you let people pick on you because of your scratchy personality? You'll love spending time with a chicken.
- If you're a fashion fundamentalist, and like to be seen around town, a tiny pooch is the perfect accessory for any outfit.
- If you have criminal tendencies and should be behind bars, you have a lot in common with a parrot.

If none of the pets mentioned above appeals to you, perhaps you should consider a pet rock. You won't have to clean, feed, or exercise it. It will never get sick, you can take it anywhere (even on



holiday), and you can be pretty sure it's happy 100 percent of the time. You can dress it up and teach it basic commands like how to sit and stay and play dead.

But the best command of all is Attack. With a little bowling action, you and your Pet Rock can scare the living daylights out of your no-longer-wanted human partner... you know, the one with the yellow teeth, the itchy butt, and halitosis? ■

## Pet Shops or Shelters:

# SOURCING A PET



Too little thought is given to where to buy your dog or cat, yet it is one of the most influential decisions in determining the wellbeing of both owner and pet. Kerry Dimmer explores three options that will help you map out your route before you make a (hopefully) lifetime commitment to man's best friend.

If you take the emotion out of acquiring a pet dog or a cat, it becomes, quite simply put, a purchase. Purchase decisions are usually motivated by finance, time constraints, overall value, and perceived risk. Applying those drivers to pet ownership would be tantamount to the same cold-heartedness that creates puppy or kitten farming, a practice that has many animal lovers sickened and outraged.

There are generally only three outlets for pet purchase: the pet shop, a breeder, or a shelter/adoption agency. A pet shop purchase is often an impulse buy, you see them in the window, think it's cute or your child is captivated, and suddenly you have a new addition to the family. There has been no forethought regarding the consequences of the purchase, nor where the animal was sourced, and no knowledge about the breed and particular characteristics.

The pet shop is not concerned about your lifestyle. They don't care if the beautiful puppy Labrador in your arms is going to

cope with living in an apartment with an owner who does not have the time to provide the necessary walks and exercise. For the shop owner, it is about the sale. While they will provide you with possibly the correct nutritional advice and some care aspects, they have very little knowledge about the individual pet's history.

### Pedigree Purchase

Generally, some UAE pet stores sell pedigreed animals that have been imported from puppy and kitten farms. Chris Lloyd, MRCVS, a veterinary surgeon who operates from Nad Al Shiba Veterinary Hospital, says that he sees many poor quality pedigreed animals in the UAE. "Most are imported from farms in Thailand and Eastern Europe that are purely profit driven. As a result there is no regulation on breeding, and no attempt to eliminate undesirable inheritable traits like hip dysplasia, eye problems, and inherited joint issues which are all quite commonplace in the UAE."

Lloyd is also very concerned about the welfare of pet shop animals. "I have seen only few pet shops that value the welfare of their animals over the profit they can potentially make. For these economic reasons, staff are poorly trained, hygiene levels and biosecurity are inadequate. The animals suffer as a result, both through neglect and disease outbreaks."

While some of these diseases are not life threatening (such as ringworm, coccidian, and ear mites), Lloyd says that viral infections like feline enteritis, canine parvovirus, and canine distemper are commonplace. On investigation, Lloyd says pet shop managers often surprise his hospital at their total lack of understanding of disease risk and control.

### Profit vs. welfare

Lloyd refers to the commercial sale of pets as profit being more valuable than welfare. He has also noticed a number of falsified vaccination documents. "The UAE imposes a rule whereby animals under five months should not be imported into the country. Unfortunately, this rule is unpopular with pet shops, as younger, more appealing puppies and kittens would then not be available.

"The puppy exporter in Thailand or Eastern Europe thus falsifies the age of the puppy to bypass this law. As a result, vaccination records are incorrect, puppies are younger than the owners think, and the animal may also not be immunised against the many infectious diseases they may encounter before they are sold."

Lesley Muncey, chairperson of Feline Friends, concurs with Lloyd adding that kittens are often weaned from their mothers too soon, and vaccinated far too early which compromises their health. "Kittens should be at least eight weeks or one kilogram in weight before being taken from their mother and immunised. There also needs to be a satisfactory incubation period."

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K9 Friends has also encountered this problem with the sale of pet shop puppies. Its chairperson, Jackie Ratcliffe, says that pet shops often buy in puppies that are far too young, even at 5-6 weeks. "They have no socialisation skills, which they would have learned from the mother. It's just a completely irresponsible practice."

But not all pet shops are bad and there are always exceptions to the rule. Lloyd points out that doing your own research is vital. "Firstly, a good pet shop will have competent staff with the knowledge to answer questions related to the breed of the animal and the husbandry required. If they cannot answer your questions on health, background, and care, my recommendation is not to buy. At Nad Al Shiba, we give, within reason, free pre-purchase advice over the phone, which does not discourage the purchase from a pet shop, but hopefully aids the customer in making an informed decision."

### Where Are the Breeders?

There doesn't appear to be many pedigree breeders in the UAE. However, both K9 Friends and Feline Friends have pointed out the common trend of home breeding. This is illegal in the UAE, and as Muncey correctly states, this needs to be done under licence from the municipality.

What is illegal usually goes underground, and while there are rumours of the breeding of Pitbulls in the UAE, it is difficult to determine where such practice occurs. Ratcliffe says that there is evidence of in-home breeding, as can be proven by advertisers who are looking for a 'husband or wife' for their existing purebred pet. "These are often home breeders masquerading as caring owners concerned for the loneliness of their pet."

You are likely to find that this type of advertisement has been placed by an unlicensed breeder on Dubizzle or other media. They may later advertise they are selling a single purebred kitten but on visiting you may find a number of kittens for sale. At this point, you'll need to check for proof of a licence to breed and if that is not produced, you cannot be assured of the pedigree.

Breeding is not, therefore, popular in the UAE, and that is where pet shops score, but again you'll have to question the source of the pet. It is far better to find a breeder outside of the UAE and have a pet imported at your cost, or alternatively ask a



pet shop to source the pet on your behalf with the correct documentation that will satisfy you that the animal has not come from a farm.

K9 Friends and Feline Friends have seen it all. In many cases, they rescued pedigree and purebred animals that have been abused and traumatized by the irresponsible and unmonitored sale of pets. Sheltering/fostering them and others who are abandoned is a difficult task, considering the proliferation of cats and dogs in the UAE. Organizations such as these are not motivated by profit or commercial exploits.

In fact these organizations depend on donations, either through the acquisition

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of an animal they are sheltering/fostering, fundraising, or the goodwill of animal lovers. Staff are largely unpaid volunteers, and “more importantly,” says Ratcliffe, “we do it for love.” Feline Friends is very proud that it manages to place all its cats in foster homes, having no need for a shelter as a result. Only tiny kittens are caged for their own safety.

#### The right information

Animals in shelters are generally treated

exceptionally well. They are rehabilitated, micro-chipped, vaccinated, assessed and evaluated for characteristics. Likewise, potential owners are required to complete a comprehensive form that will aid the shelters in finding the most compatible pet to the lifestyle and resources of the owner. Such information is vital to ensure complete happiness and longevity of the relationship between owner and pet.

Specific breeds can also be found at shelters, often a result of owners not having fully considered the demands of caring for, say, a Persian cat that has specific grooming requirements, or a St. Bernard that is unable to cope with the high temperatures of the UAE. The point is it might be worth considering contacting a shelter if you are seeking a particular breed before resorting to importing or supporting puppy and kitten farms.

Many potential adoptees worry, however, that shelters cannot provide adequate history of an animal, but Ratcliffe argues that neither can the pet store. “In fact we have a far more reliable sense of the pet than a pet shop salesperson. We may not be able to determine the parents of one of our dogs, but we spend so much time with our animals, lavishing both medical and emotional attention, that we are able to provide far more information on the individual animal than one that has been sourced from a puppy farm.”

“Yes,” agrees Muncey, “the same is true for Feline Friends. We would not allow a pet to

be re-homed into circumstances that would be detrimental to the owner or pet. We are extremely strict about match-making because we have grown to love each of the cats and kittens in our care.”

#### No Euthanasia

Neither organization advocates euthanasia for animals that cannot be re-homed, unless there are indications of extreme, uncontrollable aggression or untreatable illness. For example, at the K9 Friends shelter, they provided a home for four years to a lovable dog (although this is rare, as they endeavour to find homes for all their orphans).

Unfortunately, it appears that the majority of animals in UAE shelters are animals who have been abandoned by expats returning to their own countries without consideration for their pet. It is common for dogs and cats to suddenly find themselves on the streets, fending off other wily-wise survivors, having to deal with traffic, and sourcing food.

It is impossible to take the emotion out of buying a pet ... emphasis on the word *pet!* However, whether you choose to buy from a pet store, a breeder, or a shelter, homing a pet is one of the best decisions you will ever make, provided of course that you are prepared, informed, and committed.

