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Dog adoptors don’t have to get mutts

Most breeds have rescue groups and shelters often have purebreds

By LINDA LOMBARDI The Associated Press
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Alexandra Edwards, left, holds Sophie, as her husband Matthew Edwards, sits with Pugsly, at their home in Alexandria, Va. Both dogs were adopted via Mid-Atlantic Pug Rescue. (Jacquelyn Martin / AP)

If your heart’s in the right place, you understand the value of adopting rather than buying a pet. But what if that same heart is set on a particular breed?

Despite what you might think, that’s no reason to give up on adoption, says Betsy Saul, founder of Petfinder.com. "People are surprised to hear 25 per cent of pets in shelters are purebred," she says.

It may seem like the odds of finding a particular breed in a shelter are low — but the good news is that most breeds have specific groups devoted to their rescue. In fact, shelters often transfer purebreds to such groups to free up space in their own facilities.

On Petfinder.com, you can search shelters and rescue groups by breed for 241 breeds of pet — for the most popular dog breeds, the numbers available across Canada and the United States are generally in the thousands. The site currently has dozens of dogs available for adoption in Nova Scotia.

Matt and Alexandra Edwards of Alexandria, Va., were so happy with the Mid-Atlantic Pug Rescue group they used it twice. They wanted another dog when their pug Sophie seemed depressed after their first pug Max passed away.

FIND A GROUP:

What to expect from a good purebred rescue group:

•Look for a group that’s a registered non-profit or in the process of becoming one; it’s an indication of a certain level of organization and stability.

•There should be a rigorous evaluation process for adopters. It’s needed both for the safety of the animals and the long-term success of the match between you and your pet.

•Have patience: These groups are

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generally run by busy volunteers with jobs and families.

•The group should be upfront about the animal's potential problems, provide medical records where available and have you sign a clear adoption contract.

•A good group will provide followup help. Many volunteers are also interested in keeping up with their former foster pets.

The Associated Press

Potential owners often assume that rescue pets were given up because there's something wrong with them, but Edwards is just as happy with his dogs as with the adoption process.

"You kind of wonder if the first time you just kind of lucked out because Sophie was so wonderful," he says, "but then we adopted Pugsly and he's just as great."

Amy Lane, rescue chair of Mid-Atlantic Pug Rescue, says that the problems that land pets in shelters are generally with the owners, not the animals.

"Sometimes it's unavoidable; sometimes it's people who just didn't want to go the distance," she says.

Still, no dog is perfect, or perfect for every owner. The trick is to make the right match, and that's why the process of adoption can seem a bit daunting at first.

Rescue groups will generally have fairly substantial forms to fill out, require personal and vet references, and conduct phone and home interviews. It's all designed to make sure that dogs find the right people and people find the right dogs.

The first step for the rescue group is educating potential adopters about the breed. Many people don't realize that pugs shed, for example, or that, while adult pugs are renowned couch potatoes, saying that you want a calm pug puppy is "an oxymoron of the worst kind," says Lane.

Because rescue groups see so many dogs surrendered, they know what causes problems and what makes a good match. And since most groups are all-volunteer and foster dogs in their own homes, someone has lived with your prospective pet and knows all about his habits and personality.

One advantage of adopting an adult dog is that their personalities are more fully developed than a puppy's, so you have a clearer idea of what you're getting.

But expect a process of getting accustomed to a new home; after six to eight weeks, you should be able to see what the chemistry between dogs and family members will be for the long term, says Lane. For dogs who have been neglected or had other troubles, there may be more changes for the better over time.

The Edwards saw the seven-year-old Pugsly become much more self-confident and sociable over the course of his first year with them. Says Alexandra, "It's been awesome to see him come out of his shell."

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