

American Cat Fanciers Association

What Breeders Look For In Buyers

By Carolyn M. Vella and John J. McGonagle
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Responsible cat breeders breed cats for only two reasons: to make certain their breed does not become extinct, and to perfect the breed they are breeding. We do not breed just to have pet kittens to sell.

However, all responsible breeders will birth pet quality kittens in any given litter no matter how well planned a breeding program is. Unfortunately, breeders cannot keep every kitten they breed (no matter how much we would like to), so the pet quality kittens are sold to new homes.

A pet quality kitten is one that, in the opinion of the breeders, is not suitable for show competition against other purebred cats for one or more of several reasons. These reasons include matters such as color and color placement, relative size or perfection of physical features such as ears, tail, etc. and other subjective cosmetic features. All of these are measured against the standards of perfection as adopted by the U. S. cat associations.

Pet quality does not mean that the kitten is unhealthy. It only means that the kitten should become someone's beloved pet rather than be bred and possibly pass on an undesirable cosmetic trait to other kittens it may produce.

Breeding purebred cats is a full-time, very intensive avocation. To understand what responsible breeders expect from a new owner, it is probably useful for the potential new owner to understand a little about breeding pedigreed cats.

Breeding requires much study. It also requires time and dedication. Among those qualities that are required to be a responsible breeder are

- an ability to continue nursing a sick cat or sit with a mommy who is in labor when you have had very little sleep;
- an understanding veterinarian who enjoys working with breeders and who is available to you 24 hours a day; and
- a strong back for the physical labor required to keep the cattery sanitary, clean-smelling and spotless.

And, to be blunt, it also requires quite a bit of disposable income - the income in a cattery very rarely matches the expenses incurred. As we noted, responsible breeders do not breed to produce pet kittens to make money. In fact, we estimate that it costs from \$150 to \$250 (depending on what part of the country you live in) to raise a kitten from birth to four months old. That cost includes all of its food, its kitten and rabies shots, litter, disposable nursery supplies, special food for the pregnant and nursing mommy, etc. It does not include other costs, such as stud fees, pre-natal veterinarian visits, the occasional C- section, supplies you have to keep on hand in case of emergency, medical problems, etc. So breeders selling a pet kitten for \$300-\$400 are

not "making a lot of money".

We hope that the potential new owners understand these costs when we quote our price for a pet quality kitten. We especially hope that you understand why we may seem to react if you ask us why someone else is selling pet quality kittens (at a show, through the local papers, by an ad on a community bulletin board or through other channels) for \$100, or \$50, or even "free". You should ask yourself, where did that breeder save the difference.

Above all, the most difficult thing in running a cattery is having to part with the precious kittens we have helped to create. For this reason, a responsible cat breeder expects the new owners of a kitten to meet certain standards. While they may seem high to you, they are the minimum for us.

Essentially, we want to know you, so that we know you will take care of the kitten and, perhaps, even become a friend of ours. It is important for breeders to feel that you will love and care for your new kitten as much as we would. To this end, we may question you about many things which help us establish that you are, in fact, the person who should be owning one of the wonderful babies we have bred.

Usually we first want to find out whether or not you own a cat now or if you ever did. What we are really trying to find out is whether or not you are aware of the responsibilities involved in being a cat owner. Notice that we said "you". One of the few categorical statements that can be made about how breeders operate is that no responsible breeder will sell a kitten to you for someone else.

If you do own a cat, we will want to know specifically how you take care of it. For example, is your cat spayed/neutered? If not, why not? Your new kitten will have to be, you know.

Do you ever let your cat out of doors? There are very few breeders who will sell to a household that lets the cat run outside - even just a little bit. In addition to having the kitten be bred before it is spayed or neutered, it can run away. But most of all, we will often remind you that the major cause of death for cats is the automobile (getting hit by a car or eating anti-freeze).

We may even ask what you feed your cat. Some breeders may ask you for a letter of recommendation from your veterinarian. And some will ask for your vet's name and then contact the vet.

None of these questions mean to imply that you are an irresponsible cat owner. We ask them (and listen carefully to your answers) to reassure us that you know what it means to take care of a cat. To put it another way, responsible breeders will try to make certain that you understand that you will be taking care of your kitten for the rest of its life.

Many breeders may well specify certain aspects of what we consider to be proper cat care in their kitten sale contract. For example, our cattery's contract has a "Statement of Responsibilities" that the new kitten buyer agrees to follow when he or she signs the contract. Among the responsibilities of cat ownership that we require are: the kitten will be provided with adequate food, water, and access to a hazard-free area for play and will not be caged except for health or similar reasons; the kitten will be provided with regular Veterinary care and will have all inoculations kept in effect; the kitten will be kept well groomed, clean and free of fleas and other parasites; the new

owner will become familiar with basic animal care, including an understanding of the critical warning signs of illness and disease; and the new owner will make provision for the care of the kitten in case the owner should die or otherwise become unable to care for the kitten.

It is not unusual to find a clause like this in a kitten sales contract. In fact, a breeder friend of ours used this type clause for years before we adapted it for our own contract.

If you have had a cat who recently died, we will ask you the cause of its death. We do not mean to intrude on your sorrow. We only want to know so that we feel our kitten is going into a household where any disease has been eliminated by the time your new kitten arrives. If your cat has died of a contagious disease such as Feline Leukemia, a breeder will know how to help you to sanitize your house and how long you should wait before you introduce any new kitten into the environment.

If you ask if there is a kitten available now, please expect us to tell you that we do not release kittens until a certain age - usually 4 months. That is to make sure that they have had all of their shots, and are ready to make the transition into a new home. While a younger kitten may seem very cute to you, it is also very vulnerable to many hazards in your home of which you are not aware. It is for that reason that many responsible breeders will not sell a kitten to be brought into a new home for Christmas. Christmas kittens face not only the usual physical and emotional adaptations that all kittens in a new home face. They also face an environment which may be hyperactive (and thus frightening), one where they can be ignored just when they need extra attention, and which can be ultra-hazardous to them (eating tinsel and ribbon can be fatal).

So, respect the breeders who tell you they will have a kitten in one month, but not today.

It is very important that you own a breed of cat that fits the way you live or you will not have a successful relationship with your cat. Since purebred cats tend to have personality traits that are inherent in the breed, you may find that reading a good book which describes the different breeds may be helpful to you before you call breeders.

We will ask you if you are familiar with our breed. This is to make certain that our breed is compatible with the way you live and you will be happy with the breed itself. We breed Japanese Bobtails, an extremely active breed for all of its life. If a caller says they have an active cat in their home and are looking for another one, we may have someone whose home is right for a Japanese Bobtail.

But, if someone is looking for a cat who will sit on the sofa arm in the evening, the Japanese Bobtail is not the breed for them. For example, if we get a call from someone who wants a very placid cat, we will suggest they talk to breeders of breeds other than ours.

In asking about your lifestyle, we will ask whether or not you work outside of the home on a full-time basis. Any breed of cat, even the most placid breeds, will want to spend time with their owner when their owner comes home from a full day out of the house. This is understandable as the cat has been alone all day, just resting up so he can play with you all night long! If this is the situation, breeders may suggest you acquire two cats. This is so they can keep each other company and play with each other during the day. This can help the cats to spend plenty of "quality time" with you

once you are home without becoming too pesky.

We will also ask if there are children living in the house. This is to make certain that the children also are aware of how to care for a cat. It would be as horrible for the breeder as it would be for you to find out that a small child has let your cat out of the house and the cat became lost.

There are certain very specific things that breeders expect from owners. In most cases these items will be covered in a kitten sales contract. You shouldn't be afraid of a breeders' contract - all responsible breeders sell their kittens by contract. Our contracts reflect our own experience as well as that of other breeders.

The first point is a firm agreement that you will have the cat spayed or neutered. Purebred cats are only to be bred in a planned breeding program (one in which the breeder has planned their breedings for generations down the line for health and relationships which are genetically diverse). They should only be bred by those who have devoted themselves to the process of breeding and exhibiting purebred cats. Much expensive equipment is necessary and even more education in the areas of genetics, zoology, nutrition, veterinary medicine and feline pediatrics. Breeding one purebred cat to another purebred cat does not make you a breeder.

Another contract clause you may find is that the kitten is not being purchased to be resold, leased or transferred. Also, many contracts specify that the kitten will never be used as the subject in clinical, breeding or medical experiments. Be aware that these contract clauses are not meant to imply that you would harm the kitten in any way. If the breeder felt that you would do anything to harm the kitten, you would never have the right to buy it.

Other clauses may also appear in the contract which reflects the attitude and experiences of the individual breeder. For example, you may find a clause prohibiting the declawing of the kitten. You may be required to feed a certain kind of food, or withhold a certain type of vaccine. Naturally, you will be given a time span within which your new kitten must be seen by your own veterinarian. Remember that the breeders' first thought is for the care and well being of the little kitten you have just acquired.

All breeders hope that those who will provide homes for our kittens understand that we take these contracts very seriously. Some of the contracts provide that breeders can take back the kittens if the contracts are violated. While we hope that this never occurs, these clauses are enforced.

Another thing we expect of a new owner is that you feel free to make us a resource. Before the kitten was yours, it was ours. And we know how it was raised, what it did, and how others of this breed behave. That is not to say that we are a substitute for your own veterinarian. To the contrary! A responsible breeder will be the first to tell you to call your vet if you have a medical problem.

But a responsible breeder can be a big help on questions of behavior (Why does my kitten do that?), feeding (It stopped eating a new food I got it. Why?), temperament (My new kitten is fine, but my older cat is not friendly with it. What do I do?), medications (My vet wants to use modified live vaccines. Is that a good idea?), and related ownership questions (What other breed gets along well with this one?)

We can help you if you think you have a problem with the kitten, but you don't know.

Instead of waiting until something serious happens to go to the vet (or, the converse, going when you don't need to), you should be able to call on the breeders and at least talk through your concern. Remember, more than once we have all taken a cat to the vet on the basis that something "wasn't quite right", and saved a life as a result.

Also, if you decide that you want to show the kitten, we can help. We can tell you if you should be showing the kitten as an alter, or as a household pet, and why. Maybe we can even bench with you at the next show.

What happens if the breeders you call do not have a kitten for you -- now? Some of us keep waiting lists. But remember, only nature will determine when we have kittens, of what quality, and color. So, if we keep a list, please be patient. Some breeders who do not have a kitten available may refer you to another breeder who might have a kitten available now. But please understand that we cannot always be positive on what is in another cattery.

Above all, what a breeder expects from a kitten buyer is that you love the little life you now have. None of us breed cats without a true love for our breed and for all cats. Kittens are a joy to have around. Their antics will keep you amused for hours and they can make you smile all day long. But, as the kitten grows into a cat, it becomes a true companion. A breeders' cats are also their best friends and this is how we want you to feel about "our" precious babies.

None of the kittens we have sold are ever out of our memory or our heart. We love to hear from you. We need those phone calls telling us about something cute or wonderful our kitten has done. We want to see those pictures as it grows into adulthood. This is what makes up for the endless hours of work that managing a breeding cattery requires.

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