



Do You REALLY Want a Tibetan Mastiff?

This article is based on a post I made to our online group, Tibetan Mastiff Breeders and Owners International: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/325691887610861>. If you are looking for a puppy, currently own a Tibetan Mastiff, or are simply researching the Tibetan Mastiff breed, I highly recommend joining this group. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy and learn from the information found here.

It breaks my heart to read post after post or receive private messages from TM owners having problems with barking, biting, and aggression. This post is not directed at any particular person or persons, but to anyone thinking of taking on the responsibility of a TM, whether through buying a puppy or adopting a rescue, so please don't be offended by what I am going to say. We have a lot of people in this group who are interested in the breed and looking to add a TM to their family, so maybe this needs to be said.

Tibetan Mastiffs are a guardian breed. They are family and home guardians. They guard. That is what they have been bred to do for centuries. It's in their genes. You do not train them to be guard dogs like some breeds. It's instinctual. By the same token, you do not train it out of them. It's instinctual. If you do not want a dog that is going to fiercely guard his home and property, don't get a TM. Did I say it's instinctual? Merriam Webster dictionary defines instinctual as automatic, involuntary, knee-jerk, reactive, reflex, subliminal, visceral, impromptu, predetermined, impulsive, etc. Yep, that paints a pretty good picture of a TM. They will be sweet and docile as can be one minute and the next they will react to something that hasn't even popped up on your radar screen. Because their radar is 10,000 times better than yours. That's what I mean by "it's instinctual".

BEFORE you buy a TM, please consider whether you really want and are prepared for this type of dog.

- 1) Do you have a fenced yard where your TM will be safely contained? Do not expect to let your TM run off-leash. Not even in your own yard. There are people who will tell you that they do it, but do not expect to be able to do this.
- 2) Do you have the time to socialize, socialize, socialize your TM? Are you willing to drive to find opportunities for socialization if need be? I have been told that a puppy needs to be exposed to at least one new thing a day. A new toy, a new person, a new place, a new sound.
- 3) Can you physically handle and control a large, powerful animal? There is no shame in admitting that you can't. My hubby and I are in our 70's. We freely admit that these dogs are getting to be too much for us.
- 4) Will your lifestyle accommodate a protective guard dog? Do you have lots of rowdy visitors or do you live a somewhat reclusive farm life? Either extreme is not a good situation for a TM. They need exposure to people, places, and things, and at an early age. At the same time, those people, places, and things need to be ordered; TMs do not handle chaos well.
- 5) Can you afford the costs of a large dog? People don't seem to realize that everything costs more for a large dog. Food. medical care (spay/neuter, anesthesia, surgery, medications, flea&tick/heartworm preventatives, etc., because it takes more time and requires more medication). Even collars. Everything is more. If someone calls or emails me and the first thing they ask is "How much are your puppies?", that person goes onto the "Do not sell" list.

If you are SURE you want a TM and are prepared to do what is needed to care for one, then start by choosing your breeder carefully.

1) Look for someone who knows the breed. I see too many people buy a “breeding pair” and start popping out puppies. They do not know and understand the breed themselves, so they are not prepared to screen puppy buyers, offer advice or answer questions, or assist with behavioral issues. You WILL need help at some point in your pup’s life. Look for someone who can and will help you. On the flip side, length of time in the breed does not necessarily make someone a good breeder. Someone who has been a bad breeder for 30 years is still a bad breeder. Look for someone who offers a contract that protects YOU and backs it up. A contract should protect both parties, not just the breeder.

2) Insist on health testing and to see the results of those tests. Our breed recommends OFA hip AND elbow certifications (or PennHip), thyroid testing, and CERF eye certifications. Do not be fooled by a CHIC number. Any dog can have a CHIC number. It only means that the dog has been tested, NOT that the dog passed the tests. If your breeder ever suggests that you keep quiet about a health issue or offers a refund based on a non-disclosure agreement, RUN, don’t walk, in the opposite direction. This is a person who is knowingly hiding health issues in order to keep on selling sick and/or unhealthy dogs.

3) Meet the breeder and their dogs. If you cannot walk into their home/yard/kennel without fear, pass on that breeder. MUCH of a dog’s temperament is genetic. There are lines known for aggression or for being ultra-guardy. How you raise and socialize your TM will have a tremendous impact, but in the end, you aren’t going to change what is in the genes. I have only had one TM that would bite; she was raised in the same home, by the same people, in the same manner as all of my other TMs, and yet she would not tolerate strangers in her yard and could not be trusted in public. Others in her litter had similar temperaments. This settled the “nature vs nurture” debate for me, and made temperament a priority when I decided to breed.

4) Avoid buying over the internet, sight unseen. Reputable breeders will place puppies in good homes throughout the country and even throughout the world, but that does not mean you should not go in person to the breeder’s home to see what you are getting, especially if you are a first time TM buyer. It amazes me that people will spend \$10,000 to buy a puppy from a foreign breeder but won’t spend \$500 for a plane ticket to go see what they are buying. And maybe I should go a step further and say if you are a first-time buyer, buying internationally is not a good idea. You are going to need mentoring and guidance, and the language barrier can be a huge impediment. In addition, international puppy scams are on the rise. Dishonest breeders are advertising pups with pictures that aren’t even of their own dogs and not what you are going to get. Plus, once your money leaves this country, you can kiss it goodbye, contract or not. You do not have the benefits of U.S. laws or U.S. courts. Even worse, I am seeing the same kind of bait and switch scams starting to pop up in this country.

5) Look for a breeder that is involved in the breed, through showing and/or breed club participation: Someone who knows the breed standard, breeds to the standard, and can tell you how his/her dogs compare to and differ from the standard. Every dog has it’s faults, as they say, but purposefully breeding to enhance those faults, such as larger size or increased wrinkling in order to meet market demand, will ultimately destroy the breed. A breeder’s goal should be to produce true type, with good structure, movement, and temperament, not to produce what sells. The purpose of showing is to have an impartial judge evaluate breeding stock. Dogs are judged not only on looks or type, but structure and movement. Those who tell you it is only a beauty contest either have no concept of the actual purpose or have dogs that can’t pass muster and they know it, so they purposefully minimize the importance of showing and criticize those who invest the time and money to have their dogs judged and evaluated. 6) The same thing applies to rescues. Go through a reputable rescue that knows the breed

and will be there to help you if any problems arise. To “rescue” a TM and then have your efforts fail is the worst possible scenario. TMs do not adapt to change well, and each failed placement makes the next one less likely to succeed. You aren’t doing anyone any favors by taking on a dog that you are not prepared for, least of all the dog.

OK, you have gone through the process and have a new TM. Now what? Stay in touch with your breeder or rescue group and follow their advice. Start immediately. Don’t wait until your TM is a year or 2 old, becomes a problem, and then decide that you need to “fix” it. Your TM is not the problem. You are. It doesn't mean you are a bad person, most people get a dog with the best of intentions, but it does mean you got in over your head and that is not your dog's fault. You either took on a dog you knew nothing about, did not understand, were not prepared for, or did not follow the advice given to you. There, I said it. So shoot me. But please don’t shoot your TM. It HAS happened.

I will always do my best to help anyone and give advice where I can, and other members of our group are always willing to help as well, but we can’t fix temperament problems and we can’t offer the guidance that your breeder can because he/she knows your dog better than we do. We can only offer suggestions from our own experience and be an ear to listen and a shoulder to lean on. But in all honesty, we wish we didn’t have to be. We wish we could spare you the heartbreak that you are going through. And such was the purpose of this post.

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