

How A Dog Is Selected To Become A Breeder

Guide Dogs for the Blind

2017

Cove and her litter



Jennifer and her litter



Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) established a breeding program in the late 1940s in order to consistently produce dogs with the physical and temperamental characteristics necessary for guide work.

Over the years, through the judicious inclusion and generous donation of many fine specimens from outside breeders, GDB has been able to establish an excellent breeding colony of dogs specially suited to our program. At this time, 95 percent of all dogs produced for our program are bred from our own breeding stock. The other 5 percent consist of dogs that are the result of co-breedings with other guide and service dog organizations as well as an occasional dog from an outside breeder. These breedings through outside or co-bred sources enable GDB to diversify its gene pool and to continue to improve its colony of breeding animals. Guide Dogs for the Blind enjoys collaborative breeding projects with approximately a dozen guide and service schools around the globe. We have received and donated outstanding adults and puppies with New Zealand, Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Netherlands and Canada in recent years.

Today, the breeding colony consists of about 200 active breeders and is comprised of approximately 80 percent Labrador Retrievers, 10 percent Golden Retrievers and 10 percent Labrador and Golden cross breeds.

Breeding stock selection is based on the results of estimated breeding value calculations, behavior assessments, health screenings, and the needs of the colony in terms of pedigree and temperamental type. The dogs that have met the highest physical and temperamental standards are considered for inclusion in the colony. A thorough review of the individual dog's health and temperament history and those of its littermates, as well as its sire and dam's previous production complete the selection process.

All dogs that are unaltered while in the puppy raising home are considered as potential breeders. Once the dogs come in for training they have an initial health exam including elbow and hip x-rays, an ophthalmic exam and a cardiac sonogram. Dogs with successful exam results are further assessed by the Training staff and selections are made.

Once a dog is initially selected for the breeding colony, GDB further evaluates the dog's breeding suitability by conducting semen evaluations on the males, pre-breeding examinations on the females, relevant DNA genotype testing and further hip and joint radiographs. All breeding stock additions are considered tentative until these additional health clearances are finalized. Puppy raisers of a dog selected for breeding will be notified of the dog's new breeding status when the breeding department receives these additional health clearances.

Breeding stock dogs live with custodians who reside within a 50-mile radius of the San Rafael campus. (*Puppy raisers of breeders are given special consideration to serve as the breeder custodian if they live within a 75-mile radius of San Rafael and can meet all other custodial requirements.*) Guide Dogs for the Blind carefully reviews and thoroughly screens each potential custodial family's application and home environment in order to ensure comfortable, safe and secure homes for these valuable breeding stock dogs. This process includes completion of a written application, a phone interview, an on-campus interview and orientation at the San Rafael campus, and a home visit, including yard and fence evaluations. Finally, applicants are required to complete an on-campus dog management class that covers behavior, health care, grooming, and dog handling. The ultimate goal is to obtain the best possible home for each individual dog being placed.

Once placed, breeding stock dogs are required to be kept in peak physical condition. This includes daily exercise, grooming, flea control and formal obedience training. The dogs must sleep indoors and be treated as beloved members of the family. To ensure their safety, there is a requirement that the breeders always be kept on leash when out-of-doors and only allowed to run freely in a securely fenced area.

Every raiser of a new breeding stock dog is invited to attend a graduation ceremony at the San Rafael campus to formally present the dog they raised and be recognized for their hard work and tremendous contribution. Raisers of male and female breeders are invited to submit names for the puppies from each of the dog's litter. In addition, all litter information is shared on the GDB Puppy Central Facebook page at www.facebook.com/gdbpuppycentral.

Raising a dog that becomes a breeder means you have contributed to the continuation of our mission. Future generations of working guides will assist many visually impaired individuals.