

# “What Makes a Rottweiler Breeder Ethical or Unethical”

By Michael D. Stalter



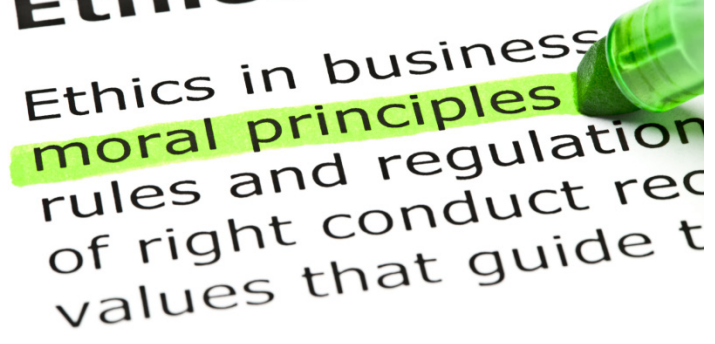
Ethical is an adjective “relating to moral principles or the branch of knowledge dealing with these, such as, "ethical issues in nursing", with synonyms: moral; social, behavioral; having to do with right and wrong, "there is an ethical dilemma to be faced".

What makes a Rottweiler breeder ethical then? What moral principles do Rottweiler Breeders face and what knowledge is needed for being an Ethical Rottweiler Breeder? What knowledge is needed by a potential Rottweiler Puppy Buyer? What are the moral, social, and behavioral things a Rottweiler Breeder needs to do that are right? What are the wrongs in the breeding of Rottweilers that Rottweilers breeders face?

In today’s world of Googling answers these questions aren’t answered very easily. Due to the overwhelming list of websites that pop up in a Google search of “What is an Ethical Dog Breeder?” or “What is an Unethical Dog Breeder?” I have to say that when I Googled those two things I was surprised at the information, which sometimes was a little contradictory.

# Ethics

Ethics in business  
moral principles  
rules and regulation  
of right conduct rec  
values that guide t



To start with finding an answer let's look at what ethical issues are facing Rottweiler Breeders and ask ourselves, what is right and wrong in breeding Rottweilers?

According to Marose Magpily, DVM, in his article, Puppies for Sale: Where NOT To Buy Your Puppy, May 20, 2015, "The Ethical Breeder, regularly tend to and evaluate the health of their dogs and have them health certified. Take for example the German Shepherd. The German Shepherd is genetically predisposed to develop a condition called hip dysplasia. Hip dysplasia (HD) describes a poor conformation of the ball and socket hip joint, which results in frequent if not constant joint pain and lameness of the affected hind leg. To prevent HD being passed on to the puppies, an ethical breeder would submit their dog for screening and certification so that only HD cleared dogs would be bred, reducing the incidence of HD in puppies."

Rottweilers are also a breed according to The American Veterinary Medical Association, (founded in 1863, is a not-for-profit association representing more than 91,000 U.S. veterinarians working in private and corporate practice, government, industry, academia, and uniformed services.) that lists Rottweilers as a breed of dog that is prone to having hip dysplasia. According to Dr. Magpily he clearly defines that an Ethical Breeder is one who has their dogs HEALTH CERTIFIED.

As someone who has owned, trained and shown Rottweilers for 31 years I know this, but who am I to say what defines a Rottweiler Breeder as ethical or unethical? However, Dr. Magpily and the roughly 91,000 veterinaries of the AVMA agree that an Ethical Breeder has their dogs HEALTH CERTIFIED. Apparently then an UNETHICAL Rottweiler Breeder is one who breeder Rottweilers that are not HEALTH CERTIFIED.



Well then what does Health Certified mean? Who does health certifications? Again as someone with 31 years of experience with Rottweilers I know that in North America the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) is who does this. These next 6 paragraphs come from the OFA's website (<https://www.ofa.org>) and they explain the OFA and their mission better than I can.

At the heart of the OFA's quest to assist breeders in lowering the incidence of genetic diseases are the OFA databases. When the OFA was formed in 1966, one of its main objectives was to "advise, encourage, and establish control programs to lower the incidence of orthopedic and genetic diseases". This objective remains firmly in place today. The databases of the OFA give breeders access to the health screening results of hundreds of thousands of dogs, allowing them to increase the selective pressure to produce healthy dogs free of inherited diseases.

The OFA's original interest was hip dysplasia. This continues to be a major focus of the organization today. However, in recent years, scientific advances and the enhanced ability to diagnose heritable diseases have led to the development of several additional databases. These include databases for elbow dysplasia, congenital cardiac disease, autoimmune thyroiditis, patellar luxation, a number of databases based on breed specific DNA tests, and the most recent additions, legg-calve-perthes (LCP) and sebaceous adenitis (SA).

The hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, and legg-calve-perthes databases are based on radiographic evaluations. Since radiographic interpretation and application of diagnostic criteria can differ among veterinarians, the OFA offers a solution by providing experienced, consistently applied, specialist interpretation. The OFA maintains a pool of approximately twenty-five independent, consulting radiologists. Each is a board-certified Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Radiology. For hips and elbows, three randomly selected radiologists from the pool evaluate each radiograph. Hip joint conformation is assigned one of seven phenotypes: Excellent, Good, Fair, Borderline, Mild,

Moderate, and Severe. Elbow conformation is graded as Normal, or Grade I, II, or III Dysplasia. The final OFA grade is based on a consensus of the three independent opinions.

The remaining OFA databases differ in that the actual evaluation is performed by a source outside the OFA. For the patellar luxation and congenital cardiac databases, an attending veterinarian performs the evaluation. The veterinarian must have the advanced training necessary to perform an accurate diagnosis, and the OFA highly recommends that board certified specialists perform these examinations. For the thyroid database, the evaluation is based on laboratory assay performed at one of seven approved OFA labs. The SA database is based on skin punch biopsies evaluated by approved dermapathologists. And finally, the DNA databases are based on results from specific laboratories licensed to perform the tests. The OFA's function with these soft tissue databases is to develop consistent diagnostic test protocols with veterinary experts, and offer breeders the databases in which to register the test results.

The common thread among all the databases remains the OFA's original objective to establish control programs to lower the incidence of genetic diseases. However, to be a useful tool, breeders and owners must acknowledge the value of such databases, and embrace the submission of data. With over 800,000 studies on file, the OFA has the world's largest data bank on canine hip evaluations. Most breeders who contribute to the data and use the database in their selection criteria have seen improvements in the health of their dogs. Although some information is better than none, for the newer databases breeders and owners must remember that it may take years for the database to become populated with enough information to allow the type of in depth pedigree research that is the goal of the databases.

The last few years have seen a great deal of focus and criticism on the practices of commercial breeders. Within the fancy we are quick to differentiate ourselves, calling ourselves responsible breeders striving to preserve and improve the breed. However, the term responsible breeder is one that is earned, not assigned based on number of litters bred, or mere participation in AKC events. Complacency over health issues, especially when in pursuit of the blue ribbon, equates to irresponsibility. As responsible breeders, we must recognize health issues where they exist, educate ourselves on the issues, and incorporate health issues into our breeding selection criteria with a specific goal of reducing inherited disease. In addition to the OFA, canine health databases are maintained by CERF, PennHIP, parent clubs, and by several leading research institutions and universities. All breeders are urged to breed responsibly and use these tools for the improved genetic health of our purebred dogs.

So in the last sentence that I quoted from the OFA "All breeders are urged to breed responsibly and use these tools for the improved genetic health of our purebred dogs." Clearly the answer to what makes a Rottweiler Breeder ETHICAL is responsible breeding to have the healthiest Rottweilers.



Ok, that seems simple enough or does it? What genetic health tests should Ethical Breeders do on the Rottweilers that they are going to be breeding? From what I read on the OFA's website they have a lot of different health tests and some of those tests are specific for different breeds of dogs.

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel have different health issues than Rottweilers. By age five, up to 70 percent of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels will suffer from canine syringomyelia, a debilitating neurological disorder in which the brain is too large for the skull, causing severe pain in the neck and shoulders, along with damage to parts of the dog's spinal cord. Rottweilers do not have canine syringomyelia so what health tests should Rottweilers have?

Juvenile laryngeal paralysis and polyneuropathy (JLPP) is an autosomal recessive, hereditary disease that affects Rottweilers and Black Russian Terriers beginning typically around 3 months of age. At 3 months of age the puppy will most likely have been sold and living with its new family, who has spent money to buy the puppy and is now forming emotional attachments with the puppy. JLPP affected dogs have difficulty breathing when excited or exercised and may have a change in their bark. As the disease progresses, they develop weakness and loss of coordination in the hind limbs which will eventually progress to affect the front limbs as well. They may also have difficulties swallowing which can result in choking or pneumonia. As the disease progresses, dogs with JLPP can become unable to walk at all.

In researching to write this article, I found that just about every source of information recommended that Ethical Breeders did the health tests on their breeding dogs that were recommended by that breeds parent club. The AKC Rottweiler enthusiasts follow the ARC recommended health tests and the German/European style enthusiasts follow the ADRK recommended health tests and there are a couple tests that are different with each club.

Rottweiler enthusiasts here in the United States are divided into two main groups basically, those that participate in American Kennel Club (AKC) activities and those that participate in German/European style activities. Those that participate in the AKC activities are inclined to follow the mandatory breeding practices of the American Rottweiler Club (ARC), which is the Parent Club of the Rottweiler Breed for the AKC.

Those that participate in the German/European style activities are inclined to follow the mandatory breeding practices of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Rottweiler-Klub (ADRK), which is the Rottweiler Parent Club in Germany and since the Rottweiler originated in Germany the ADRK is also the parent club of the Rottweiler with the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI). The FCI is the international federation of a number of about 87 national kennel clubs around the world and it is based in Thuin, Belgium.

The required health tests for the ARC are Hips, Elbows, Heart, and Eyes being certified as normal by the OFA at 2 years of age. The ADRK's required health tests are Hips, Elbows being certified as normal at 15 months of age by the ADRK's veterinary and JLPP test to know who is a carrier of the gene and who is clear of the gene, as two carriers are not allowed to be breed.



Jerold Bell, a geneticist at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, strongly recommend that people only buy puppies from breeders who follow the parent clubs recommend health tests no matter what the breed of dog is.

Since the ARC and the ADRK's recommended health tests are not the same, how do we determine if a breeder is being ethical or unethical? It is my opinion that people looking to buy a puppy use these 5 different health tests as a scale to rate how ethical a Rottweiler breeder is. but I am no expert. However, Jerold Bell is an expert, he is a geneticist at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, and he strongly recommend that people only buy puppies from breeders who follow the parent clubs recommend health tests no matter what the breed of dog is.

Following either the ARC's or ADRK's list of tests would in my opinion make the Rottweiler breeder extremely ethical and consequently the Rottweiler breeder who does none of these tests on their breeding dogs is extremely unethical. Breeders doing some of these tests but not all would be in my opinion somewhat ethical. At the time of me writing this article all of the breeding Rottweilers that I own and co-own have all of the ADRK's recommended health tests, Hips, Elbows, JLPP and Hearts. These are all Certified by the OFA or the FCI

In researching for this article and what makes breeders ethical or unethical I found some other very interesting data. In the AKC's Guide to Responsible Dog Breeding the AKC says "The goal of breeding, after all, is to produce a better dog, Breed to Improve." When I read this I had to wonder how would the unethical breeder respond to the AKC's position, when so many of the unethical breeders claim they are just breeding "PETS"? Maybe we can put the Rottweiler Breeders who are just breeding pets in the unethical category, especially if they do not do any health tests on the dogs they breed. Breeding "just pets" seems to be a common excuse to justify not doing health tests.

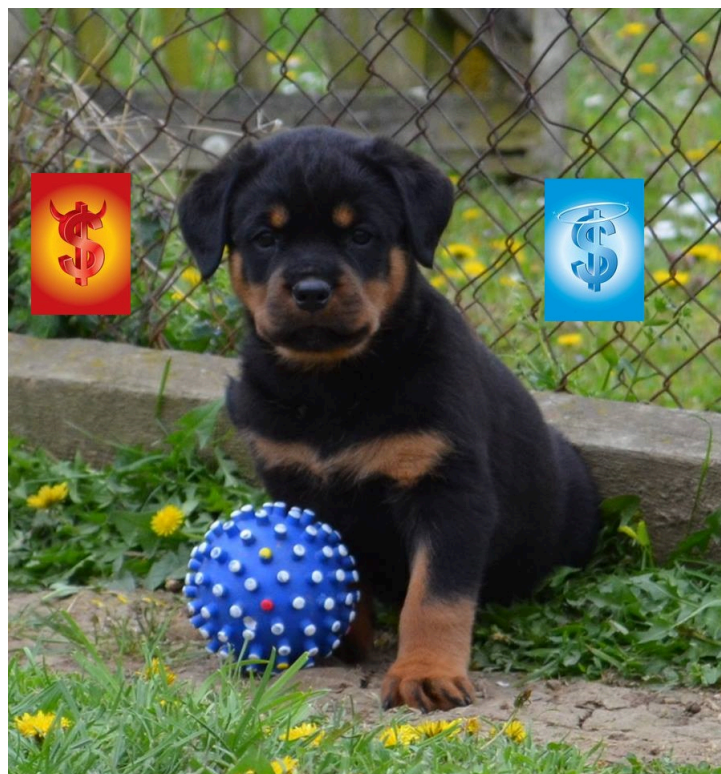
Also the AKC recommends for a puppy buyer to, "Determine if the breeder is involved in the dog community. Ethical dog breeders breed their dogs to improve the breed. They are proud of their dogs and are active at dog shows and in breed organizations." Jenna Stregowski, (RVT and Animal Hospital Manager who is the editor of the online magazine Dogsabout.com) "The dogs who have no titles, either showing, working, or sports, likely means the breeder does not breed to better the overall conformation or working style of the breed. They are breeding solely for "pet quality" means breeding for money rather than for the betterment of the breed." To me that means the unethical breeder probably won't participate in any types of dog shows or other sports. They are not interested in the betterment of the breed, only making a profit.



Jenna Stregowski also goes on to say that unethical breeders will allow their puppies to go to their new homes before they are 8 weeks of age. (I guess the guy that I saw posting about letting a puppy go to its new home at 5 weeks of age is a very unethical breeder.) She also goes on to say " When

talking to or meeting with a dog breeder, you must look at the facts, but also go with your gut. If something does not feel right, ask questions. If you have any doubts that the breeder is responsible, your best bet is to walk away. Start from square one, looking only for a responsible dog breeder.” Ask to see the actual HEALTH CERTIFICATES and the CERTIFICATES of any titles claimed that the dog has earned.

Malaika Fernandes, (director at “Princely Paws – Canine Training, Behavior Modification Consults) writes in her article, How to choose an ethical dog breeder, April 18, 2017, “The ethical breeder does not support him/herself by breeding dogs. Breeding should not be a business—done correctly, there is very little money to be made in breeding dogs. Steer clear of breeders who make their living off of producing puppies.” A breeder once told me that he had a plan to make \$10,000 a month off of breeding Rottweilers using what looked like pyramid scheme to cover his expenses in retirement. I bet Malaika Fernandes would say that this breeder was very unethical. Ethical breeders work to support their dogs; their dogs do not support them, unethical breeders have their dogs supporting them.



Now I am sure some of you reading this are thinking, why do I care what some unethical breeder does, I wouldn't buy a puppy from them. However, I think that as responsible and ethical Rottweiler owners we should care.



Marose Magpily, DVM, who I mentioned earlier in this article says that “Unethical breeding is harmful to the breed and the ignorant breeder is an unethical breeder.” He goes on to say, “The more distressing issue is that many of these breeders who breed for profit are not even aware that their practices are detrimental to their chosen breed or to dogs in general. They sincerely claim to be dog lovers and welfare advocates, some will even spend huge sums of money to build special housing and facilities for their breeding dogs, and the dogs will actually look well-cared for and are really loved as pets. Even so, because of their ignorance, many if not most of these breeders fall short of the standard of true ethical breeding and do inadvertent harm to dogs as a consequence because they do no health tests on their dogs.”

I have talked too many of the people who had consequences with their dogs. Owners who were extremely upset to actually crying because their dog, who they love with all of their heart, is sick and or in pain, sometimes needing to be put down. One very strong and tough combat veteran was crying like a little child because his 1 year old Rottweiler puppy was going to be put down the next day due to having JLPP. Another strong and tough combat veteran was on the verge of tears as he told me had his Rottweiler’s hips x-rayed and evaluated by the OFA and the hips were rated “Severe”. I have talked to many people whose Rottweilers had genetic health issues that honestly just broke my heart.

When my daughter was starting her senior year in high school a friend of hers got a Boxer puppy from an ignorant breeder who just wanted to breed their Boxers. My daughter wanted to get the last pup in the litter that was a very sweet female and I tried to talk her out of it. But for only \$200 my daughter got the Boxer puppy and named her Brook. At just under 4 ½ years of age we had to put Brook down due to the health issues she had. Brook had hip dysplasia, Osteomyelitis (an infection in a bone), and over half of Brook’s teeth were fractured. Watching my 21-year-old daughter who was by then a nurse cry at the vet’s office as she held Brook in her arms while she was being put to sleep was heart breaking. I really wanted to slap the stupid unethical breeders of Brook.

I am writing about this because I believe as a Rottweiler owner and breeder, I have a moral responsibility to do what I can to educate the unethical breeder. To help them become an ethical breeder and to educate people wanting to buy a Rottweiler puppy. Michelle Barlak, senior associate at The Seeing Eye, which is a guide dog school in Morristown, N.J., says “An irresponsible breeder will likely display ignorance or denial of any genetic defects in their puppies.” I think that the ethical Rottweiler owners and breeders need to tell these irresponsible or ignorant or just plain unethical breeders that they are hurting the breed that we love and causing pain to the owners of the Rottweilers crippled from hip dysplasia.

However, if we as owners and breeders of Rottweiler don’t police ourselves then others will, like the government. Kitty Block is President and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States and President of Humane Society International, and she supports laws that regulate dog breeders. She

supported former Ohio Gov. John Kasich when he signed into law legislation that says how breeders can breed dogs.

Do we as breeders want the government telling us what we can and can't do as breeders? I sure don't, but these laws are not the result of ethical breeders working to better the breed but because of unethical breeders who have no regard for the quality of the pups they sell to people or for the people they hurt who are angry and upset and hurt when they realize the wonderful puppy they thought they bought has turned into a sick and suffering dog, like my daughter's boxer.

I have had a lot of these people with the sick and suffering dogs call me and want help, they want advice and guidance on how to fix their situation and there is nothing I or any other breeder can do. So these people who are extremely motivated are talking to their elected representatives and work on laws to stop these unethical breeders. However, these laws also many times hurt the ethical breeder. Maybe if the ethical breeders would have worked to educate and change the unethical breeder we would not be in the situation where the government make laws on how to breed dogs.

Genetic disorders cannot all be prevented, but their frequency and impact on the health of purposefully bred dogs can be significantly reduced with health-conscious breeding. It doesn't matter whether someone is a professional breeder, or just wants to breed their family pet. They are creating living beings that will become someone's family member. If they are not willing to do health screening on the parents, then they should not be breeding. Prospective buyers should ask for official documentation of health screening results on the parents of puppies before purchasing. Health conscious and ethical breeders are happy to provide the documentation.

Buying a puppy is one of the most exciting times in life for a person or family and the question is what can responsible and ethical breeders do to help the people buying a puppy? The American Kennel Club, the ASPCA, and PETA, along with just about every Humane Society recommend reporting and publicizing the unethical breeders. A simple Google search of "unethical dog breeders" gives a multitude of websites to read.

WikiHow to do anything has one of the best articles, "How to Report an Unethical Dog Breeder" May 1, 2019, that says "Unethical dog breeding is a problem, and this practice can lead to unhealthy dogs being sold. Dog breeding and puppy mill laws vary by state and country, so what is considered ethical and unethical may not be the same everywhere. To report unethical dog breeding, learn how to recognize the signs and then reach out to animal control or animal advocate organizations." WikiHow's goal is to prevent people from suffering financial and emotional losses that could have been avoided if the buyers had bought a puppy from an ethical breeder.

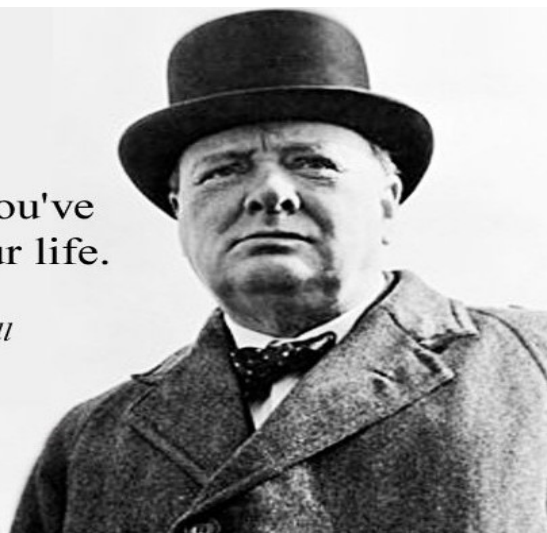
I have loved the Rottweiler Breed since I bought my first Rottweiler in May of 1988 and saw how wonderful Rottweilers are. I have learned from so many Rottweiler people that those of us who truly love the Rottweiler are the ones responsible for their protection as a breed. I also believe that those of us who have had Rottweilers for a number of years have a duty to help the new people and the uneducated people who have Rottweilers. I also believe that those who love the Rottweiler want the best for the Rottweiler and that means embracing the protectiveness and loyalty that the Rottweiler shows for the people they love.

I hope that I have answered the question of what is an ETHICAL and UNETHICAL Rottweiler Breeder and what the MORAL and RIGHT things are that need to be done and why. I also hope that I have encouraged all who read this article to be an ETHICAL Rottweiler Owner who calls out and tells the unethical breeder that they are hurting the Rottweiler breed, either through their greed or through their ignorance.

I know that being an ethical Rottweiler owner and calling out the unethical breeders is hard for some because the unethical breeders will call you names and maybe even threaten you. For me I just laugh at the names I am called, I am not a nice person to those breeders hurting the Rottweiler and I am even more amused when they threaten me. After a 28 year career of working with and around hardened criminals and having them threaten me, the threats from unethical Rottweiler breeders are just laughable.

You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.

*Winston Churchill*



I know what is right and what is wrong with breeding Rottweilers for money and so do the unethical Rottweiler Breeders or they wouldn't care what people said about them. As I said at the beginning of this article, the word Ethical is an Adjective, the simplest definition of an adjective is that it is a word that describes or clarifies a noun. Adjectives describe nouns by giving some information about the noun, which is in this case a Rottweiler Breeder.

All Rottweiler Breeders can be ETHICAL ROTTWEILER BREEDERS, and even the unethical Rottweiler Breeders can become ethical, all they have to do is the right thing. It only takes a little moral integrity to do the right thing, to do the health tests on the Rottweilers you are breeding.