

BORDER TERRIER BREED HEALTH GROUP

HEALTH AND HEALTH RELATED ISSUES WHEN BUYING A BORDER TERRIER PUPPY

Like humans, dogs can suffer from a wide range of health conditions, some of these conditions, like many of our own, may be genetic in origin. There has been a lot of negative publicity concerning genetic health problems in pedigree dogs, and many people are now worried that buying a purebred animal may mean health issues for the dog, along with emotional and financial distress for the owner.

In fact, one of the main advantages of pedigree dogs is that they are a lot more predictable in terms of appearance, temperament and also in terms of any health issues which may be encountered. Crossbreeds can also suffer from inherited health problems which can be much more difficult to predict. They can also be a lot less predictable as regards to temperament and appearance.

For a brief background on Border Terrier health issues, prospective puppy owners should read the summary of 'Health Issues' and consult other parts of this website for more detailed explanations of individual conditions, and up to date information about the health of the breed.

HEALTH ISSUES

The Border Terrier, bred originally to be capable of withstanding the rigours of hunting in all weathers, has long enjoyed a reputation for longevity and good health. This reputation is well-founded and is borne out by a number of surveys including a major one conducted by the Kennel Club for all breeds.

No breed of dog, indeed no living creature, is completely healthy. However, the Border Terrier appears to be one of the healthiest breeds in existence. Most go through their lives without requiring a great deal of veterinary intervention but no animal is guaranteed good health. These days it is worth considering Pet Health Insurance for any dog, though the owners of Border Terriers will hopefully not need to claim too often.

The results of the latest Kennel Club survey, published in 2016, gave an average life expectancy for Border Terriers of twelve years. This is two years longer than that of all breeds, however it is two years less than the average life expectancy recorded in 2006, but still confirms that Borders are likely to live to an advanced age.

When looking at all breeds the commonest causes of death were; cancer, cardiac disease and old age. In Border Terriers the top three were; cancer, trauma and old age. There was a high level of trauma-related deaths in Border Terriers; including road deaths and other accidents. This could be attributed to the breed's independent

streak and their ability to “switch off” to their owner’s commands when distracted. Many of the trauma related deaths occurred in younger dogs, which could explain the apparent reduction in average life expectancy.

The survey also highlighted several conditions that were most likely to impact on the general health and welfare of the breed including:

- Old age
- Trauma
- Alimentary problems including inflammation of the gums (gingivitis), stomach (gastritis) and colon (colitis).
- Skin disease, including ear problems
- Cancers (non-specific).

According to the survey, of all illnesses and conditions, Border Terriers did seem to have a slightly higher than average level of neurological problems, when compared to other breeds.

In recent years two neurological conditions; Spongiform LeucoEncephaloMyelopathy (SLEM) and Canine Epileptoid Cramping Syndrome (CECS), along with a condition affecting the gall bladder; Gall Bladder Mucoele (GBM), have been under investigation.

Spongiform LeucoEncephaloMyelopathy (SLEM)

Commonly known as Shaking Puppy Syndrome (SPS) amongst the Border Terrier community, is an uncommon neurological condition. This condition normally presents at 2-3 weeks of age, although a few rare cases haven't presented until 8-12 weeks.

A major advance in the breed came in 2017, when there was the development of a DNA test for SLEM/SPS, which should hopefully mean that we see no more affected puppies. Due to this, the condition is unlikely to be a problem for puppy buyers, but is something which breeders must address. All reputable breeders should know the status of their breeding dogs. However, if the puppy may be bred from in the future, it is important to ensure the puppy’s genetic status (please see elsewhere on this website for further information).

Canine Epileptoid Cramping Syndrome (CECS)

Commonly known as Spike’s Disease, this is a seizure-like disorder that occurs in a number of breeds, but is a particular concern in Border Terriers. It is believed to have an inherited component, but diagnosis is not straight forward. Symptoms can be very varied but a common factor is that the dog remains fully conscious during the episode, and is normal at other times. This condition is currently under investigation by the Animal Health Trust (please see elsewhere on this website for further information).

Gall Bladder Mucocoele (GBM)

This appears to be an emerging condition that seems to be affecting Border Terriers more than most other breeds. The condition is, by definition, a disorder characterised by the deposition of thick mucus into the lumen (interior space) of the gallbladder. This can be a potentially life threatening condition if not diagnosed and treated early. There is currently work going on at Nottingham Veterinary School in an attempt to establish the prevalence of the condition.

Please see other areas on this website for more information about these three conditions.

BUYING A BORDER TERRIER PUPPY

IS THE BORDER TERRIER REALLY THE BREED FOR ME?

Border Terriers are essentially terriers and this means that you, as a future owner, are unlikely to be able to keep any other small animals or birds such as hens, hamsters, or rabbits. The Border Terrier may well kill them; that is in their nature.

They may be fine with cats if they are brought up with them as a puppy. However even then, family cats may be seen as part of "the pack" but strange cats may be viewed as prey and possibly injured or even killed by a Border.

Some of them are escape artists and will get through the smallest hole in fences, hedges etc. This means they may wander off and may even get into neighbours' gardens and put paid to any pet animals or hens that they find there, so your property needs to be totally secure.

Borders are intelligent but are not always obedient. They can be trained up to a point, but if they are running loose and are distracted by some animal or even by a person, they may well run off.

Originally they were bred as working terriers and so they may well chase and kill foxes, hedgehogs, rabbits, squirrels, mice etc. This does not mean that they must be kept on the lead at all times, but it does mean that you have to be aware of your surroundings when out walking with them.

Because they were bred to work, to follow hounds and to be capable of keeping up with horses all day, the Border Terrier has a great deal of energy. This means that although they are happy sitting on your knee and relaxing, they do need plenty of exercise to keep mind and body fit and healthy.

They also need company and you should ask yourself: "Will there be someone at home for enough time each day for us to have an active dog of this kind?"

If they are not trained at an early age, some Borders may become aggressive towards other dogs. This means that puppies should be socialised at an early age, perhaps by taking them to socialisation classes.

Border Terriers have a thick double coat. They do not cast their outer coat but they have an undercoat which they shed. Depending on the individual dog they may need to have their outer coat stripped about twice a year. The nature of the breed's coat means that Borders are not hypoallergenic and therefore may not be suitable for some allergy sufferers.

Every member of your family should want the dog; if any of your family has reservations about having a dog in the household, this will impact on the dog's happiness in the future.

WHERE TO FIND A BORDER TERRIER PUPPY?

Preferably try to contact a respected and responsible Border Terrier breeder. These can often be found through one or other of the seven UK breed clubs all of whom have websites as follows:

The Border Terrier Club	www.theborderterrierclub.co.uk
East Anglia Border Terrier Club	www.eabtc.co.uk
Midland Border Terrier Club	www.mbtc.org.uk
Northern Border Terrier Club	www.thenorthernborderterrierclub.co.uk
Scottish Border Terrier Club	www.scottishbtc.co.uk
Southern Border Terrier Club	www.thesouthernborderterrierclub.com
Yorks Lancs and Cheshire BTC	www.ylcbtc.co.uk

or through the Kennel Club's Assured Breeder Scheme as below:

www.thekennelclub.org.uk/services/public/acbr/Default.aspx?breed=Border+Terrier

It is ideal, if possible, to buy a puppy which has been bred and reared in someone's home. If that is not possible and it has been bred in a kennel, you should ensure that it has been subjected to the recommended socialisation plans outlined in the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme.

Local adverts in newspapers (and on some commercial websites which advertise many different breeds of dogs) are not always the best way to find a reputable breeder.

When you have found a breeder ask if he or she is a member of any of the clubs for the breed, as most of the clubs will have a General Code of Ethics, which you should read before buying a puppy. Breeders who are members of breed clubs should abide by their club's Code of Ethics.

The key to having a successful relationship with your Border Terrier is research! There are many good books on the breed and further information can be found on the above breed club websites.

CONTACT WITH A BREEDER

You should expect that a reputable breeder will ask you a number of pertinent questions about your ability to look after their precious puppy. Be wary of any breeder who only asks if you have the money to pay for the puppy, but does not make enquiries about your lifestyle, house and garden and how you intend to care for the puppy. That may be an indication of the level of aftercare you will receive.

Reputable breeders will undertake to have the puppy back if you have a change of circumstances and can no longer look after the puppy correctly.

Key points to remember:

- You should always see the puppies with their mother. The father of the puppies may live many miles away, so you should not always expect to see him.
- When viewing the puppies they should be in a clean environment and should show no signs of illness such as runny eyes, diarrhoea or a pot-bellied appearance. They should be happy to interact with you and the mother should be fine with you handling the pups in her presence.
- By law a puppy cannot leave its breeder until it is eight weeks old and before leaving its breeder it must be microchipped, so ensure you obtain the microchip documents.
- If the puppy is registered with the Kennel Club, you should obtain a registration certificate from the breeder when you buy the puppy, or the breeder should advise you when they applied for the registration papers, or when they intend to do so; they can let you know the registration numbers of the mother and father. If you are in any doubt, you should contact the Kennel Club (telephone 0129 631 8540) BEFORE you buy the puppy.
- Make sure that if there are any endorsements placed on the Kennel Club Registration records for your puppy, you are aware of what these conditions may mean.

Questions to ask the breeder:

Has the puppy been vaccinated?

Some breeders will carry out the first round of vaccinations before the puppy leaves for its new home, others will not. This is because there are many brands of vaccination available and not all vets use the same one. Therefore, please check with your breeder and veterinary surgeon regarding this.

The puppy's first vaccination will often be at about eight/nine weeks of age, with a second dose 2-4 weeks later depending on the brand used and the age of the puppy. It is fine however if the first vaccine is given later than eight weeks, but the puppy is not considered fully protected until two weeks after the second vaccination.

Your vet will advise you of any infection risks in your area and as to whether the pup can go out before this. If the puppy has been inoculated ensure that you are given

the appropriate documents by the breeder and are aware of when the next vaccination is due.

Has the puppy been wormed?

Puppies should be wormed at least every 3 weeks until 12 weeks of age and should therefore have been wormed at least twice before they leave the breeder's premises. You should be given information regarding the dates of worming and what brand of wormer was used.

The breeder should also have ensured that the puppy is also free from other parasites, such as fleas or ear mites.

Has the puppy been examined by a veterinary surgeon?

This is not essential but some breeders do have their veterinary surgeon undertake a simple health check before the puppy leaves them. Whether or not this has been done, it is good practice for the new owner to register with their own veterinary surgeon as soon as possible and to have him/her check the puppy over.

What has the puppy been fed?

It is wise initially to continue feeding the puppy what it has been used to having and to make any changes in feeding regime only gradually. This will help to avoid any immediate stomach upsets. Some breeders may give you a sample of the food the puppy has been eating to get you started.

How much and how often has the puppy been fed?

The breeder should normally provide written details of this and it is wise to follow these instructions very closely certainly in the first few days of the puppy being with you. It is important throughout the dog's life to avoid overfeeding. Obesity is one of the major problems faced by all dogs - Border Terriers included.

Has the SLEM/SPS DNA status of the parents, and therefore the puppy been established by the breeder?

All reputable breeders should know the SLEM/SPS status of their breeding dogs. It is essential to know the status of your puppy if you are considering breeding in the future, however for most puppy buyers this is not something they need to worry about. The condition has three status's; Clear, Carrier and Affected. Puppies with a Clear and Carrier status will not present with the condition, and if mated to a Border Terrier that is clear, they will never produce an affected puppy. However, if a Carrier is mated to another Carrier there is a 25% chance of some of the resulting pups being affected by SLEM. Please see other areas of this website for further information on this condition.

Has the breeder had any experience of their dogs having Canine Epileptoid Cramping Syndrome(CECS)?

How and what causes this condition is not yet understood and most breeders will not have experience of producing dogs that suffer from the problem. It is however believed that any dogs which suffer from the condition, or are suspected to, should not be bred from. Please see other areas of this website for further information on this condition.