

## SO YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE A MINT?

By Dorothy Olson

Why not? You've wanted a Mastiff for a long time now. But the prices are awfully steep. Hey, wait a minute. What if you buy a female and breed her; you should get her cost back easy. And more. Right?

Theoretically it sounds good. Realistically, well, let's take a look:

Preparations for breeding your bitch may include:

1. To help rule out genetic problems in your future litter, your bitch might be hip x-rayed, her eyes checked (by a canine ophthalmologist), including certification registration fees.
2. Stud fee. You may have to pay more "up front" than you might have thought, with varying due dates for the remainder. Contracts will vary, but stud owners are getting smarter and tighter stud contracts are being written.
3. Vet tests, including brucellosis, heart worm, current shots, fecal check, etc.
4. Vaginal culture to determine if your dog might have an infection which might preclude a successful breeding. Plus medication if such is found.
5. Vaginal smears to determine when in her cycle the bitch is ovulating, and therefore the optimum time to breed.
6. Vitamins. One current theory has it that vitamins C and E may help to successfully conceive.

Pre-breeding activities are done. Traditionally the bitch is taken to the male. If distance is involved, you may have heavy-duty shipping costs (including purchase of a crate if you haven't one already). If your choice is to drive, then you have time off from work/home and travel costs. If the stud is nearer to home, you may still have time and gas money involved. Breeding cannot be put off for your convenience: It's too easy to "miss".

Perhaps you happen to have an unwilling, unco-operative bitch. If muzzling and/or physical restraint don't help, the stud owner may have to call upon a vet's assistance. If artificial insemination is required, the cost may be yours. Here again, it depends upon the contract.

It's done and you're home again. Do you really think you're going to sit on your hands for 63 days? Hah. You can't wait to find out if you really have puppies coming, so at the correct time you take the bitch to the vet to be palpated. "Well", he says, "I think I feel something, maybe." But you really want to KNOW, so a little later there's another visit for x-rays.

Congrats. You have puppies. Also a bill for 2 office visits and x-rays.

Let's see to your whelping preparations: Whelping box (wood is not cheap), heat lamp and/or heating pad, hemostat for cords, scale for taking weights, etc., (as found in all the lists for whelping a bitch). You have purchased and READ umpty-ump books dealing with "How to whelp your litter" -- Right? You've talked to everyone you could in order to make yourself ready -- Right? You know exactly what to do, how to do it, and what behavior and physical clues to look for -- Right?

The time has come. Your bitch may have an easy time and a normal whelping. But what if she needs a C-section? (It's more common than you might think). Even after normal whelping it's usual to give her a shot of pitocin. And you might want to have your vet check out the pups just to make sure they're OK. (If you owe the vet any more, you'll have to get a second mortgage.)

Prepare yourself for sleeping near the box for several nights -- it's fairly common for the bitch to step/lie on a pup, and if you're "sawing them off" in an upstairs bedroom, you may wake the next morning to find part of your investment cold and stiff.

My, my, that's too bad. Mastitis, huh? Another vet call and more medication. Oh? Lost one (or two)? Autopsy (\$\$\$) showed an infection, huh? Had to take them all in for a check (\$\$\$) and they're all on antibiotics (\$\$\$)? Too bad that your bitch can't/won't nurse the pups, because now you need baby bottles, formula, and a new alarm clock for 'round the clock feedings. If the bitch won't take care of them you'll need cotton balls (lots) and a lubricant to stimulate elimination.

Has it occurred to you yet that your family has not had a real outing in quite a while? You couldn't leave the bitch alone as her due date drew near, and you sure can't leave her and the pups for longer than just a few hours. Even when older, the pups will still have to be fed and let out frequently. You've had to beg, borrow, or steal every newspaper you could, because that stack that looked sufficient disappeared in 2 weeks. Even those 3 copies of the Sunday paper that you bought in a panic only lasted a day and a half. Yet, no matter how often you pick up the litter box papers, how often you wash and disinfect, the SMELL pervades the entire house. Puppies have puppy odor. Your friends could walk in the house blindfolded and KNOW immediately that you have puppies. Spend a little more on Lysol spray and room deodorants, why don't you.

Glad they're doing great now. But think: You're asleep on your feet, you're just around the corner from the poor house, and you still haven't sold a pup.

Don't sit back and put your feet up, 'cause you're not done yet. You must register the litter with AKC (including registration fee, of course). And before these pups are much older they'll be

weaned to (very) expensive puppy chow (which disappears at an astonishing rate), with perhaps some pablum to ease the transition. They'll need their first puppy shots, a fecal check and worming pills. Done? Great. Now sell them...

Advertising can be one of your greatest expenses. You may wish to place ads in: Dog World, local papers, regional newsletters, MCOA Journal, MCOA puppy placement service, etc., etc., etc. Your budget may range from \$5 to \$500, depending on how quickly those "good home" people appear. (And don't forget, those pups are still eating their heads off.) And now that they're growing so fast, you'll need a bigger puppy pen for inside and out. And a puppy decided to supplement his diet with gravel from the backyard and you have to make a trip to the after-hours emergency vet (big \$\$\$)?

Plan to spend an extraordinary amount of time on the telephone, both local and long distance (subscribe to a cheap long distance service?) You may wish to invest in an answering machine, so that while you're picking up the kiddies from school, you'll not miss THE CALL that could be a sure sale. Some calls will be easy: discussing pedigrees, litter parents, kennel background, guarantees. Others will find you explaining what a Mastiff is, why your prices are so high (or so low), or convincing the fellow who wants a pup to guard his junkyard that he does not want a Mastiff. Not to mention your time spent actually showing the puppies -- or waiting around for the folks who never show up.

Hope you have a nice camera because poor pictures won't sell pups. And it should be instant because prospective puppy buyers don't want to wait for long for you to send pictures. And a lot of film as puppies don't often pose well every time. And of course, pictures of the sire and dam, et al. And how about your pedigrees? Impressive-looking several generation pedigrees are not cheap.

Have you considered what to do with pups if they do not sell? Do you have the facilities to separate them at 7-8 weeks? Have you the time to socialize them all adequately? (A shy, older pup is a bummer to sell). To begin kindergarten obedience and manners? To take them to fun matches for exposure? (Have you ever tried walking on leads a gaggle of young pups?) What will you do when you have a 6-month old pup that you don't want to keep? Or can't keep because your neighbors are ready to lodge a formal complaint because of your dog population? Do you give him away? Try to sell him at a give-away price? Put him to sleep? Think about it now, before it happens ...

The purpose of this article is not to say "Don't do it." Just be aware of what you're getting into. Be aware of all the possible costs (both emotional and dollars) involved. You may not have them all, but you should be able to financially support your litter, whatever happens. Don't count on puppy sales to shore up your shaky bank account, sales may be slow. And, wait a minute, what if you have all or some of these costs, but only 2 or 3 pups? Think about it...