

Puppy Selection: How I Do It and Why I Didn't This! Time

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey everybody, welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and today is the big day. On today's podcast I am going to answer the number one question I've been asked all over social media in the last month and a half. What puppy am I picking? I'm going to share with you how I go about picking a puppy, either for myself, or if a student asks me to pick a puppy for them, this is how I go about doing it, which I rarely do anymore, but I'm going to start with a review. I love reading your reviews. So please, please, please wherever you are listening to this podcast, leave me a review. And if you are listening to this podcast, I strongly encourage you to go on over to YouTube, youtube.com/dogsthat and watch this episode. This episode in particular, lots of graphics to go with this one.

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Alright. This review. It comes from a listener in Great Britain with the handle of Agilitysequin, and the title of this review is 'More gems'. "I've been following Susan for years and these podcasts are adding another layer to my dog training and my life in general. They make me a better person, a better dog owner, a better parent and look at life in a different way. I'll give you an example." I love this story by the way. "My three-year-old started nursery school after a year of being stuck in lockdown with pretty much just me during the day. On collecting him, it was a far from the movie moment of him running into my arms. In fact, by day three, he was crying when I turned up to get him."

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It's heartbreaking. Why am I laughing? Oh my. "Being dragged away from all of that play and his peers, it was not cool. His response to seeing me was getting worse and worse each day. I was at first, very upset. It was soul destroying. As we had such a lovely relationship. I just happened to be driving home with a Susan Garrett podcast on. Make everything a game and add value where you can. I did just that."

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"The next day amongst his tears, I asked him to race me to the van. I told him to stretch out his arms to touch the van as there was a prize, adding value for the boring journey. He was reluctant, but he joined in. Day two, no tears and ready to race. And now we are 4 weeks on, and he runs into my outstretched arms for a hug. We race off laughing towards the van seeing who gets there first as he climbs into a seat as fast as he can for his prize which is usually a banana."

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"Another win, getting a child into a car seat has never been pretty." I have heard that from a lot of people. "Better dog owner, better person, better parent. Thank you, Susan, for continuing to help us all in this crazy game we call life xx." What an awesome review. I love the story and I love how you guys are taking the concepts and putting them into life. Whether it's with kids, whether it's with coworkers or your spouse, or if you run a business, it's your team. All of the things that I'm talking about— yeah, maybe not except for today. All of the things I most often talk about on this podcast, you can apply to pretty well every walk of life.



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But today we are talking about how to pick your next puppy. Now I am not talking about how to pick the best breeder. I'm assuming you've done all your homework and they've checked all the boxes and you're now looking at a litter of puppies. I'm also not talking about how to pick a rescue dog, because a lot of you, you know, you're going to go out and you're going to get a rescue dog. And that is a great thing to do too. You can take a lot of the concepts that I'm going to talk about in today's podcast, but in particular, I'm talking about how I go about selecting puppies.

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And because I compete at the highest level of agility, I have to have a pedigree dog because at the world championship events, they don't allow dogs without pedigrees. And so that's one of the reasons I do. Plus, I love the line of Border Collies that I've had. Now this is my third generation from and it's fun. Every four years I breed a litter of puppies.

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Now it's been five and a half years since I've had a litter of puppies and that just made this journey more and more special for me. I was so looking forward to having a puppy, it was, you know, traditionally every four years. It has been that since 1988, I've had a puppy at the minimum every four years.

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There's been a couple where it's been every three years. This was five and a half. So, I was super, super excited about it. Now on [episode 13](#) of Shaped by Dog, I talked about selecting a name. That's a pretty important part of the process so I'd recommend you listen to that. And the first thing I do when I'm going to select a dog, it happens long before I ever go look at the litter. It is about setting an intention.

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So, what is it that you are looking for when you're looking for your next dog? Don't just say, "Oh, I want an amazing family pet." That's too vague. Let's get specific. Say things like I want a dog who's going to want to learn new things. Or I want a dog who loves consistent exercise because I'm an adventure girl.

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Well hey, Tater Salad probably wasn't hoping he'd land in a family of Border Collies when he was put up for adoption. But that's where he ended up. And sometimes he does puts up the "No, please not another walk. Just take those Border Collies. They want to go. I don't want to go." So, are you looking, are you setting the intention that you want a dog who, you know, enjoys a brief walk of 20 minutes once a day, but really doesn't expect more than that?

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What about, do you have other pets in the household? So, are you looking for a breed of dog that's known to get along with other pets like cats or, or other dogs? And what about kids? You know, a lot of breeds can be taught to be very respectful and good with kids, but that needs to be trained. Don't expect that it just comes in the package, right?



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So, there are some breeders who won't sell puppies to families with kids. This is a true story. When I was a kid, my older sister, Vicki, she was desperate. She lived and breathed dogs. Now Vicki is seven years older than I am. She wanted a Siberian Husky. And you know, I have eight brothers and sisters, and so my parents weren't affluent. And my father was a steelworker. My mother, you know, raised us kids. And so, you know, they couldn't go out and get a high price pedigree dog.

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They found a six-month-old toy poodle that was in the paper that was up for sale. But the breeder said, "No, I don't want to sell to kids." And my mother explained, well, this was for her daughter who, you know, has been drawing dogs her whole life and desperately wanted a dog and do you think, you know, you would sell us this dog. And so, the woman wanted to meet Vicki. Now, my mother just omitted to offer up the fact that there might have been one or two or seven other children in the house. So, we were all upstairs as the interview went on with Vicki and the parent downstairs.

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I think Vicki was 12 at the time. And lo and behold, she got the poodle and she was great. She was great part of our family for many, many years, first dog that I ever owned, or I remember. So, is having a dog with kids important? Set the intention. That is the first part always in going to pick your puppy. Set that intention the long before it, long, long before.

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There's three areas that I look for when I am picking a puppy. The first is the structure of a dog. Now you might go, "Susan, I don't know how to look at structure." This is an easy thing to do. Now this isn't etched in stone, but this is a pretty good indication that a dog has good structure.

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A dog that trots a lot they often have pretty good structure. And you can tell when a dog trots and they kind of float along. Now, if you're watching this on YouTube, you'll see a video clip of Alexis, one of the puppies in the litter here. And I mean, all four of these puppies have beautiful structure, but she just floats.

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And you can, you don't have to know why. You don't have to know that her angles of her shoulders allow her front end to reach out or that her angles of her rear allow her to step up underneath herself. You don't have to understand any of it, but you can just see, wow, that's pretty. Now sometimes when a dog doesn't have the greatest of structure, they don't trot much at all. They walk or they run. So that might be an indication that a puppy might not have the best structure.

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But I go to two resources for my structure, both written by the late Helen King, who was a friend of mine. And the first book is '[What's Your Angle?](#)' You can get that on Amazon. The second is '[Picking Your Performance Puppy](#)'. And she describes what structurally in very easy terms how to understand what you're looking at with structure. The second thing I look at is the temperament, and that is how the dog thinks, learns, acts, you know, goes about life.



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How much heart does that dog have? How much drive? Now there are standard temperament tests that you can go ask the breeder, have they gone through, you know, there's so many that don't take into consideration the dog, the puppy in front, when they're being tested. I really like the ones from [Avidog](#) and I'll put a link in the show notes to how you can find that. Temperament is very important, but you can't dog train great structure.

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So great temperament without great structure. If you're looking to do something like I do with performance sports, having great temperament, a great drive without that great structure. You could have a great agility dog, a performance dog, but they may not stay sound very long. Right. For a family pet, it isn't as critical, but you don't want one that's really poorly broken down when they're a seven or eight-week-old puppy. Because the chances are, you might have structural breakdown down the road.

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So, temperament and structure go hand in hand. So, you could look at something, "Oh, that's a 10 on structure, but temperament, the dog is not really that driven, is kind of just unfocused and disengages and, or maybe as fearful." So I would take a lower structure and a better temperament, but I'm not going to take a five structure. I might take a nine or eight structure and have a great temperament.

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Now, those of you who don't understand what I'm talking about, about temperament test, here is what I want you to know. Don't walk into a litter and see a puppy that's shy and go, "Oh, that one, he seems to be cuddling right up beside me or he's in the corner cowering. Oh, he really needs somebody like me to look out for him." Shy, you know, I'm not saying don't ever take that. If your heart tells you to take it, I'm okay with that provided it's your heart and not your nurturing instinct. All right. Make sure it's your heart, not your nurturing instinct.

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Because shy requires a lot of confidence building, a lot of work on your time and acquires really good dog training to be behind that. So, it's maybe not going to be something you can do on your own because shy could easily turn to fearful. Fearful goes to reactive, reactive goes to aggressive. And then you have a dog that you can't do all those wonderful lists of things that you had in your intention. You can't go on family picnics or take the dog for walks down the street.

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You know, there's a lot of things you're not going to be able to do with dogs that have a lot of anxiety if you're not prepared. And even if I say you can work it out with a shy dog, if you have the really good dog training chops and have a really good coach to help you, depending on what kind of start that puppy got, it may be challenging for anyone to recover that.

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So, temperament super important. You don't want a puppy at either end of the spectrum. If you're new to owning a dog, you don't want the shy dog and you don't want the zoomie in your face, snapping at your face when they jump up to bite you, they want to bite you in the face. Probably not great for your first dog. Alright. So, structure super important. Temperaments super important.



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Number three thing is what does your heart say? I am big on the woo. I am big on the woo. I ask myself questions. And I feel what my body tells me. So, if my body leans away and go “stay away”, like I'm, you know, smelling something like a skunk, Ooh, my body will tell me. If my body says, “this is good for you.” I'm going to lean in and I'm going to be so excited for that. I'm big on the woo. You can turn this off, but if you want to know why I pick the puppy that I picked, stay tuned. All right.

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So, structure, temperament, heart. Those are the three things that you should look for. And it's your heart, but make sure it's not your nurturing instinct. Nurturing instinct will go, “Aw, he needs somebody to take care of him. Even though he's all broken down and he's afraid of me and he's trying to bite me, I think I'm going to take him home.” That's your nurturing instinct. Don't listen to it. Okay, listen to it when it's your own kids, but not a puppy you're considering buying.

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The fourth thing. I mean, I said there's three main things, but the probably one of the most important things is what does a breeder say? If you've done your research and you've picked a good breeder, trust that breeder. Because they know these puppies better than anyone. And if you are super clear and explain to the breeder what your intentions are and what you're looking for, they will match you up very, very well.

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So, trust the good breeders out there. Okay. So those are the considerations that I have. And the intention of you on a flyball dog versus an agility dog. Like I probably will pick a different structure if I'm picking flyball, versus— although you can do both, I definitely would pick if I want a phenomenal agility dog, I might pick a slightly different like knee set versus if I wanted a phenomenal flyball dog.

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Okay. So, a lot of people second guess themselves when they pick a puppy, they go, “Is that the best puppy? Was that the best? Is that the best puppy out of the ones I had to pick from?” Instead of going in with looking for the best puppy, try this, consider “is this the best puppy for me?” Or even “is this the puppy that was intended for me?” Ask yourself that question when you go in to see a litter of puppies.

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Don't get wrapped up on if it's the best. Because the best puppy, if you're not a good match personality wise, it's no longer the best puppy. So, ask the question, “What's the best puppy in me, for me and what is the puppy that was intended for me?” That's what I always want to know. I want to know what is the puppy that is intended for me. So normally, now let's get to the puppy I chose. Normally, I would say don't pick a puppy before seven- or eight-weeks structure. You really want to wait until eight weeks. Normally I've made my decision by seven weeks.

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With Momentum's litter, it was seven weeks. With her mother Feature, it was three weeks. Swagger, it was the day he was born because he was the only puppy and I fell in love with him right away. So, for me, it starts with an intention even before the breeding has happened many times and definitely with this breeding. I was so excited about this breeding. There was so much involved, there was so much risk.



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It was COVID. And I had to ship in semen from Wales and it almost didn't arrive at the right time. And the results of progesterone testing. And I ended up having to, in the midst of lockdown, drive to the FedEx building, you know, near the airport. And I'm driving up to the reproductive clinic, which was an hour and a half away with this big can of semen flown in from Wales.

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And because it was COVID and shipping was so expensive, it cost me \$3,000 just for the shipping. And I'm driving and I looked in the backseat and it's an incredibly phallic looking container. So, I'm driving very slowly because I don't want to have to explain what's in that container if I get pulled over.

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So, I was so involved right from, you know, the moment of pickup. And I was so looking forward to this litter, but I had my intention set up of the puppy that I wanted, the character, that the goofiness, the fun loving, the adventure seeker, the gifted athlete, you know, these are all the things I had set. And then if you listened to [episode 13](#), you know, I have the name before the puppy's born. And I can't remember if the name came to me even before the breeding, it may have. I was reading a book.

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The book is called '[The Resilience Project](#)' by Hugh van Cuylenberg. The book is about, he was a primary school teacher and he was teaching in India and he realized how positive the kids were that he was teaching. These young kids were— and he narrowed it down to, they were filled with gratitude, empathy, and mindfulness. And when you contrast it to the kids that he taught, you know, the anxiety and the stress, and he narrowed it down to those three things. So, I did consider the name 'Gem' because I'm always talking about dog training gems.

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So, I considered 'Gems', the plural of gem, gems. But I read the book and the name stood out to me and I'm like, well, that's a weird name. I don't, I don't think I should name my dog to that. People are going to think that's the weirdest name ever to name a puppy. And so, I just let it go for a day or so. But I came up with the registered name. So, her registered name is 'Say Yes to Being in the Moment'. So, her registered name is 'Say Yes to Being in the Moment'.

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Now, she has three other litter mates, and I'm going to put their names in the show notes. I don't want to fill this up with too much because I'm already over time. So, I've got the name and I'm kind of have the call name, but I keep going back. That's crazy thing to call a puppy. And every night I talked to Momentum as she was pregnant, and I would say the name and I got that strong feeling. Yep, that's the name that you're going to call and the puppy that's meant for you is going to be coming out. And I like puppies with a lot of white on their face.

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So, Feature's got all this white and Encore before her head all this white. Swagger doesn't have a lot of white, but he was the only one. Momentum's got this big white face. I liked that big white face. I'm really attracted that.



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So, I would talk to the puppy and I would say, "Do you have a big white face?" and there's, you know, the leaning way. "No, no I don't." "Well, you have white on your face, right?" "No, no I don't." I kept—that's weird. I'm getting a puppy with no white on his face. That's a weirdest thing. Very woo. I know I'm going to a land of woo. But I just had a strong feeling that this was my puppy.

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Well, then the next day after I had this conversation about what my puppy looks like. Then the conversation was with myself and Momentum's belly basically. I heard for the first time a song on the radio from the movie, [The Greatest Showman](#).

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And the lyrics for the song say, 'This is brave. This is bruised. This is who I'm meant to be, this is me. Look out cause here I come and I'm marching on to the beat I drum. I'm not scared to be seen. I make no apologies. This is me. So, my puppy's name is This! That's what she wanted to be called. And when she came out, I knew the second she was born, that the puppy who currently goes by the name of Stevie B really came to me with the name *This!*

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Now some of you may be saying, "Wait Susan, you just told us that we need to consider structure and temperament and heart and all of that and now you're just saying, uh, you read a book, listen to some, some song, get your woo on, pick a puppy?" Let me just set things straight. I second guess myself the whole way along and said, "Okay. Just be sure. Keep an open mind. You've never picked a puppy this way." But knowing that, I had two really lovely dogs structurally, I knew This! puppy's structure was going to be beautiful.

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Quite honestly, This!'s structure is not the best structure in the litter, but it's still beautiful structure. Every week I would say "Are you sure, Susan? Are you sure This! is the puppy? And here's how I knew. Because I would envision myself handing this puppy over to one of the other three owners. Now, let me tell you that the three people who are getting the other three puppies are all very good friends and long-time students.

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So, it's not like I'm handing a puppy over to Voldemort or anything and saying, "here's your puppy." But when I envisioned handing over This! to any one of those three, it just broke my heart. Knowing that I had a litter with really good structure, knowing that they all have lovely temperament and every week, every antic, every craziness that This! showed as she grew up just made it more and more clear there was never any other puppy for me.

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And if you read any of my social media posts, I've given a tip off through many of them. I've shared I think the very first picture I shared of her, I wrote This! Which by the way, is the way I'm going to spell her name, This! Because when most people share something on social media with the word 'this' and an exclamation point, they often are sharing something that is heartfelt and beautiful and that's the way I feel about my new puppy.





Episode: #36

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Do me a favor. Keep This! between us. Like both the puppy and what I've just shared with you. Don't spread it all over social media, send people to my podcast here at Shaped by Dog [episode number 36](#) and let them find out for themselves. I'll spill the beans later in the week to the rest of the world, but let's just keep it at least for the weekend to people who listen to the podcast.

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That's it! How much fun would that be? That's it for Shaped by Dog. I look forward to telling you many, many stories about my little This! girl. I'm so excited to see how she's going to grow. I just love her. See you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 13: Naming Your Puppy or Dog](#)

[Book: What's Your Angle: Understanding Angulation and Structure for the Performance Dog
by Helen Grinnel King](#)

[Book: Picking your Performance Puppy by Helen Grinnel King](#)

[Avidog Website \(Search for the word Temperament\)](#)

[Book: The Resilience Project: Finding Happiness Through Gratitude, Empathy and Mindfulness
by Hugh van Cuylenburg](#)

["This is Me" by The Greatest Showman Cast from 'The Greatest Showman Soundtrack' \(YouTube\)](#)



Puppy Selection: How I Do It and Why I Didn't This! Time

About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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