Consumer Rights

Although we don’t often think of them in this way, our pets, including puppies, are ‘goods’ for the purposes of the Consumer Rights Act 2015. This legislation includes the following terms in sales contracts between a consumer and a trader. Goods must:

- be of satisfactory quality;
- be fit for a particular purpose;
- be as described;
- match the sample or model examined;
- be installed correctly.

If these consumer rights are breached you may be entitled to reject the goods and receive a full refund or, alternatively, to request a repair or replacement at the trader’s expense.

Remember, you only have these consumer rights if you have contracted with a trader, for example at a pet shop. If you have purchased from a private seller you only have the right for the goods to be as described – so make sure that you ask questions about the animal’s health if this is not described in an advert and make a careful note of what is said to you. A good way to do this is by using a ‘Puppy Contract’ – which can be downloaded for free from the RSPCA website: puppycontract.rspca.org.uk.

For further advice about your consumer rights contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 03454 04050.

Things to Remember

Here are some tips to remember when you are thinking of buying a puppy:

- view the puppy with its mother and litter mates where it was bred and be suspicious if the seller will not let you do this;
- get as much information as you can about where the puppy has come from and beware if the seller is outside the UK;
- ask to see vaccinations documentation – the veterinary practice details should be on this paperwork;
- if you suspect the puppy has been imported, remember the criteria of the ‘Pet Travel Scheme’;
- never agree to have the puppy delivered to you or to meet the seller in a place away from where the puppy was bred – be suspicious if the seller suggests this;
- never pay for the puppy in advance;
- what would appear to be a ‘bargain’ price for a puppy may prove to be very expensive – the puppy may become ill shortly after purchase or may have to be put into quarantine at your expense;
- illegally importing puppies is a crime. You can anonymously report any suspicions you may have to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
The number of puppies being illegally imported into the UK has dramatically increased in recent years.

These puppies are most commonly sold via adverts on the internet and are often accompanied by false or forged documentation. Usually these puppies are much cheaper than the equivalent UK bred puppies.

The UK is a rabies free country and there are rules and regulations in place to maintain this status. However, puppies are being smuggled into the country without having received an effective rabies vaccination. Rabies is a fatal disease of the nervous system that can affect all mammals, including humans, cats, dogs, farmed animals and wildlife. The disease is spread by the bite of an infected animal.

Even if the puppy does not have rabies, it may have other health or behavioural issues. It might have been separated from its mother too early or have health issues which have not been diagnosed or treated. Sellers of illegally imported puppies are usually more concerned with selling the ‘goods’ as quickly as possible, rather than the welfare of the puppy.

Imports

Cats and ferrets, as well as dogs, can travel with their owners between European Union Member States without needing to be put into quarantine - provided they meet the criteria below. Please note that this ‘Pet Travel Scheme’ is designed only to allow owners to travel with their pets but is often abused by people associated with overseas ‘puppy farms’.

Owners of dogs, cats or ferrets can enter or return to the UK if their pet:
- has been microchipped;
- has a pet passport or third country official veterinary certificate;
- has been vaccinated against rabies (please note the vaccination must not be administered until the animal is at least 12 weeks old and also at least 3 weeks prior to entering the UK);
- has been treated for tapeworm between 1 and 5 days before entering the UK (dogs only);
- has travelled on an approved route.

If you are considering purchasing a puppy that you suspect may have been imported, be sure that the import complied with the above criteria, otherwise your new puppy will have to spend time in quarantine at your expense. This can cost more than £1000.

Microchipping

Even if your dog is not imported and you do not plan to take it abroad, it must still be microchipped by a trained professional (a vet).

Your contact details will be stored on a database against your dog’s microchip number so it can be returned to you if it is lost or stolen. You are responsible for keeping this information up-to-date. You can do so by contacting the database company your dog is registered with. If you fail to ensure that your dog is microchipped you could be fined £500.