



BUYING A PUPPY AND HOW TO AVOID GETTING SCAMMED

Buying a puppy online is risky business.

When contemplating the purchase of a puppy, the internet can be an extremely useful research tool to narrow down the breeds likely to best suit your family's circumstances and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the internet is also the place where scamsters lurk, ready to pounce whenever you start investigating the availability of puppies of your favoured breed(s). Always be mindful of the common law maxim, "caveat emptor" – "the buyer beware" – which has never rung truer than when applied to a purchase of a puppy, a deed often prompted by impulse, family pressure or emotion.

It's unwise and risky to search for a puppy online, but should you venture to do so, at least be forearmed with the knowledge to identify dodgy websites and fake social media pages. Be mindful of the fact that the people operating these invariably transient websites and other online platforms are artful and accomplished scamsters to which the unwitting public fall victim every day. Watch out for:

- A site flaunting the KUSA logo and, for your convenience, even KUSA Transfer of Ownership Forms (fake, of course). KUSA does not permit its logo to be used to attract puppy buyers and its official forms are not made available on other websites.
- A site that offers puppies of a variety of breeds for sale, including your favoured breed. Even if it's not a scam site, it will undoubtedly be a puppy mill which no responsible person should ever support.
- Sites pushing so-called 'designer' breeds, usually at extortionist prices – Cockapoos, Labradoodles, Goldadors, Maltipoos – and a host of other crossbreeds with bizarre appellations. KUSA does not permit purebred dogs on its registry to be mated to other breeds.
- Sites advertising breeds in unusual colours; the more exotic the colour, the higher the price. You're likely to find that these colours are not permitted under the breed standards of the breeds in question. Chances are they result from genetic defects, often culminating in severe health problems for the affected animal down the line.
- Sites giving unrealistic guarantees, such as puppies being fully house-trained at eight weeks of age.
- Sites quoting a flat fee for flying a puppy to any destination. Travel costs vary according to a puppy's weight, size of crate, distance to be travelled, etc.
- Sites pledging to fly a puppy in an "air-conditioned crate" (at an additional cost, of course!) with a hefty quote for airport taxes, shipping costs, etc. Travel costs are readily available from airlines servicing a particular route and can also be established via <https://www.petlounge.co.za/>.

Should you make contact with one of these sites and start making enquiries, you risk exposing yourself to the following typical scenario:

- You'll be probed on the breed you're interested in, the sex and colour required and, voilà!, they'll happen to have one "in stock"! The availability is often the serendipitous result of a "last-minute cancellation", and you'll be told that people are now queuing up for the puppy. The pressure is on; it's first come, first served.
- The seller will always be in a remote location, so that there's no chance of your visiting the premises.
- You'll be made to feel special with a promise that, if you're prepared to settle all the costs up front – final vaccination, flight, crate, travel costs to the airport – you'll be allowed to jump the queue.
- You're delighted and buckle under the pressure. You hasten to transfer the funds into a bank account provided.
- You are soon advised that the puppy has been booked on flight so-and-so, departing on some future date at whatever time and reminded to meet the flight your end by reporting to the freight section.
- When you're about to leave for the airport to collect the puppy, a call from the seller... The airline is refusing to load the crate, because it's a size too small for the puppy. They're prepared to sell a crate one size up at a cost of Rxxx. You need to do an immediate transfer of funds as the flight is about to close. (Not to worry, the previous crate will be returned to the supplier and the cost refunded!)
- You relent once more and transfer the funds required.
- With this *coup de grâce* administered, all communication ceases. You'll wait in vain for your puppy to arrive and the number of the seller will meet with a forbidding "the subscriber you have called is not available at present..."

Further useful information can be found in the KUSA leaflet, ***Finding a Puppy***, at <https://www.kusa.co.za/images/Gallery/Puppy%20Leaflet.pdf>

Help! – I've been scammed!

If you believe you've been scammed, please report the scam to the Facebook Page **Puppy SCAMS in South Africa**. They investigate puppy scam websites (not Facebook pages) and ensure that puppy scam websites are listed on the AA419 database, a globally recognised organisation. You can reach the **Puppy SCAMS in South Africa** Facebook Page on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/report.puppy.scms.south.africa/>

Further essential steps:

- Contact the SA Fraud Prevention Service hotline – 083 123 7226
- Report the scam site to <https://yima.org.za/reportscam>
- Report the transaction to your bank's fraud division
- Open a case against the "breeder" at your local police station, even though the contact details would invariably be fictitious. At least the receiver's bank account will be placed on record.
- Report person and number to WhatsApp if WhatsApp messages exchanged.

Simple steps to avoid falling victim to scamsters.

- Research is key. The worst decision you can make is to succumb to impulse, which invariably impairs judgement and rational decision-making.
- Narrow down your choice of breeds by doing proper research by, *inter alia*:

- Consulting the Breed Standards on the KUSA website to establish the purpose for which a breed was developed and its typical traits,
- Consulting the numerous resources available online, e.g. articles on a breed, covering its ownership, wellbeing and possible genetic defects, and
- Consulting your veterinarian on his/her experience with a breed you're considering acquiring.
- Attend dog shows (consult the Events Calander on the KUSA website) to meet and interact with breeders and owners of a particular breed.
- Contact KUSA to establish whether the breeder you intend buying from is a KUSA member in good standing, who registers puppies with KUSA.
- Visit this breeder at his/her premises to assess, first-hand, the conditions under which the puppies were raised or, if the breeder is in a remote location, arrange for a trusted person to do the investigation on your behalf. If satisfied that all is above board, request copies of the Sire and Dam's KUSA Registration Certificates.
- Inform the breeder that you expect that, once the puppy to be purchased has been identified, you would be offered a purchase & sale agreement with full disclosure of the agreed terms, e.g.
 - The purchase price (the initial deposit to be paid to reserve the puppy and the fee to be paid in final settlement when taking possession of the puppy).
 - Any conditions attached to the sale (spay/neuter requirements, breeder's restrictions, etc.).
 - Details of any additional Health Tests to be done and at what age.
 - Assurance that your puppy will be KUSA-registered and that its Certificate of Registration and Certified Pedigree will be provided to you within [state period], with the authorisation of transfer into your name duly completed and signed on the reverse (to enable you to transfer the puppy into your registered ownership).
- When the puppy is fetched, delivered or shipped, make sure that you receive its Vaccination Certificate, and a copy of any Health Tests already performed on the puppy. Some responsible breeders, who take pride in their breeding, will also provide the new owner with a "Puppy Book" containing interesting breed-specific information and often some puppy pictures.

Vigilance and discernment – essential requirements for every buyer

Please note that KUSA is registered with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform & Rural Development (DALRRD) under the Animal Improvement Act, 62 of 1998, as the only South African registry for purebred canines. Remember, **KUSA does not register breeders**, but is constituted as a voluntary association of members who register their purebred dogs with KUSA. KUSA is, however, not in a position to guarantee that dogs on its registry, or their progeny, are free from any inheritable or congenital defects, or give any assurances on the standards of performance of dogs acquired from its members. It has no legislative powers to adjudicate between parties in disputes over the purchase and sale of dogs; it's the responsibility of the buyer to exercise vigilance, discernment and sound judgement when purchasing a puppy or an adult dog.

Once informed, we all have our part to play in protecting gullible consumers from any possible pitfalls by advocating the utmost caution and vigilance when acquiring a pet that will become a family member for the next ten to fifteen years.