

Fraudulent pet stores biting perspective owners

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Last February, Ms. "A," a media celebrity, laid out 210,000 yen to purchase a male Labrador Retriever puppy at an outlet of a major pet store chain. Upon the advice of the shopkeeper, she also paid for insurance that guaranteed replacement should the animal die within three months.

Of course, she never anticipated what was to ensue. Just four or five days after taking the dog home, it became ill. She took it to a clinic run by the pet shop, but after three weeks, the animal died of distemper.

Because distemper has an incubation period of at least one week, Ms. A suspected her puppy had become infected before leaving the shop.

The store offered a replacement, but Ms. A refrained from accepting the new puppy they offered as it appeared "unhealthy," and she feared a repeat. When she attempted to delay payments on her credit card, the store threatened to put her on a blacklist. Her efforts to telephone the store manager or veterinarian who treated for her dog were stonewalled.

Her "experience" of being a dog owner lasted for all of five days.

Shukan Playboy reports that pet-related complaints to a consumer advocate organization have increased rapidly. From 489 complaints in

犬・猫 使い捨て国家ニッポンの悲慘

1994, the figure rose to 674 last year. In July of this year, another group opened a "telephone hotline" for people with pet-related problems. On the second day alone it received 42 calls.

"It's rare for pet shops to make refunds to customers," says the Japan Animal Welfare Society's Chizuko Yamaguchi. "In most cases, customers wind up swallowing the loss."

According to Yamaguchi, at the root of the trouble is poor sanitation at the breeding, distribution and sales stages. As opposed to laws in other countries safeguarding the health of puppies and kittens, the Japanese pet business is virtually unregulated; those seeking to change this situation have been given a bureaucratic runaround.

"According to Japan's warranty law, a store is obliged to refund the money for an animal that was already sick at the time of sale," lawyer Yoshiro Morino tells **Shukan Playboy**.

Clearly, the system in which pet stores designate their own veterinarians is working to cover up liability when things go wrong.

Finally, readers of **Shukan Playboy** receive some advice from pet experts: Buy it directly from the breeder. If you can't find a breeder, deal with a pet shop close to your own neighborhood, but wait until the animal is at least 3 months old and has pedigree papers. Look for a lively animal without any eye discharge, running nose or diarrhea. And when you pick it up, a healthy young animal should feel heavier than it looks. (MS)

**Initials stand for: Mark Schreiber,
Takeshi Ito and Michael Hoffman.**

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