

PUPPY FARMING

By RSPCA Superintendent Alec Davidson

This term is loosely used by various members of the public and the media to describe any 'commercial' establishment which breeds dogs for sale.

As in any other occupation there are good and bad keepers of animals. Fortunately, the 'bad apples' are in the minority but are apt to taint the remainder with bad practices and poor standards.

RSPCA records for 1985 show that through the Inspectorate, Animal Homes Department and voluntary workers, the Society re-homed over 51,000 dogs. Although this is itself a considerable achievement, it illustrates clearly the sobering fact that at some stage each one of these animals had become an **unwanted** pet owned by people who had acquired them voluntarily but either *could not* or *could not cope* with the responsibility.

Sadly, over 52,000 dogs had to be humanely destroyed; they were either unsuitable for re-homing or no homes were available. These figures do not take into account the numbers dealt with annually by veterinary surgeons and other organisations, nor do they include the vast numbers of dogs found straying and dealt with by the police.

On an average, one third of all stray dogs are destroyed, one third are re-homed and the remainder claimed by their owners.

It is not, of course, suggested that breeders who make a business of selling their animals are entirely responsible for this state of affairs as without a demand, supply will cease. Nevertheless, in recent years it is apparent from our records that the number of irresponsible persons who breed dogs purely for profit and licensed to do so has increased dramatically.

Large numbers of puppies from such 'puppy farms' are distributed to pet shops, especially in cities, and to large kennels ('puppy supermarkets') where they are resold to members of the public. Many puppies sold from such establishments are purchased on impulse. Parents often succumb to the appeals of their children and in some instances do not really want the responsibility involved.

Veterinary surgeons are regularly treating poorly bred specimens or those which develop sickness or disease shortly after purchase. From the complaints received there is also a strong indication that some of these puppies are sold before they are properly weaned. If members of the public are doubtful, the animal should be seen by a veterinary surgeon immediately.

Under the Pet Animals Act, 1951, pet shops are licensed by the local authority and one of the conditions of the licence is that animals will not be sold at too early an age. Although this Act controls the *selling* of pets, it was not until the Breeding of Dogs Act was passed in 1973 that any control was imposed upon

suppliers. The 1973 Act states that any person who breeds dogs from any premises which include a private dwelling where two or more bitches are kept for the purpose of breeding for sale, must obtain a licence issued by the local authority, and various conditions apply.

In one area of Wales which is covered by two Inspectors, there are over 80 such licensed establishments and no doubt others exist illegally. The RSPCA has evidence that in some cases, dealers contact the various breeding premises and collect puppies, sometimes twice a week. These animals are then transported by rail or road to the shops and kennels.

Transit by rail has decreased recently and this has caused difficulty in checking consignments. At some of the known points where puppies are taken for resale, checks are made whenever possible on vehicles. Some have been found to contain as many as 30 to 40 puppies.

On page 21 you can read the comments made by the Secretary of The Kennel Club, Mr Martin Sinnatt, concerning the 'buying in'

of litters of puppies and the mixing of such litters. Little imagination is required to appreciate that, if one puppy travelling in close confinement with others is incubating some infectious disease, this will be passed on to others in the same vehicle. When sold there is every chance that the symptoms of a contagious disease will then become apparent to the owner who subsequently complains to either the RSPCA, or their local veterinary surgeon.

Whenever an animal is purchased it is essential to have it checked by a veterinary surgeon *without delay*. It is well worth this additional cost and at the same time advice can be obtained on the various inoculations which are necessary to prevent possible suffering later.

Convictions have been obtained against breeders for neglect and cruelty. If you have a complaint which requires investigation, a telephone call to your local RSPCA Group Communications Centre (see telephone directories and Yellow Pages) will receive attention.



'Puppy farm' is a term loosely used to describe any 'commercial' establishment breeding dogs for sale — the RSPCA brought a successful prosecution against the owner of these premises