

Malinois Puppy Breeder-Visit Checklist

Use this checklist to prepare, collect evidence and compare observations. Complete it with the breeder—not from memory after you have fallen in love with a puppy.

A puppy assessment can improve your odds. It cannot guarantee adult health, temperament, protection suitability or household safety. A serious concern outweighs a high number of ticks.

BREEDER / KENNEL

VISIT DATE AND PLACE

LITTER / DATE OF BIRTH

CANDIDATE PUPPY / IDENTIFICATION

SIRE

DAM

1. Before arranging the visit

- ☐ We wrote down the adult dog's real daily life, not only the desired protection work.
- ☐ Every adult household member agrees to a Malinois and understands its likely intensity.
- ☐ Children, visitors, employees, other animals and travel have been considered.
- ☐ The primary handler has enough time for training, exercise, management and rest every day.
- ☐ A qualified, reward-based working-dog trainer is available for long-term guidance.
- ☐ Local ownership, protection-training, use, liability and insurance rules were checked.
- ☐ Secure transport, fencing, separation and emergency care are realistic.
- ☐ We have a fallback career and placement plan if the dog is unsuitable for protection work.
- ☐ We know our non-negotiable health, temperament and household-fit requirements.
- ☐ We will not buy on the first visit merely because a puppy is available.

2. Documents to obtain before selecting a puppy

- ☐ Registered names and registration numbers of sire and dam.
- ☐ Pedigree showing at least three generations.
- ☐ Independently verifiable hip results for both parents.
- ☐ Independently verifiable elbow results for both parents.
- ☐ Current specialist eye-examination results for both parents.
- ☐ Copies or links for any additional national breed-club health tests.
- ☐ Written purchase contract and health-guarantee terms.
- ☐ Lifetime return / take-back clause.
- ☐ Sample puppy veterinary, vaccination and parasite-control record.
- ☐ Microchip or permanent-identification process.

Registry links / result numbers / questions

Breeder, Parents and Litter

3. Questions about the parents and family

- ☐ Both parents were physically and behaviourally mature when bred.
- ☐ The breeder explains why this pairing was chosen—including weaknesses they hoped not to double.
- ☐ Seizures, epilepsy and unexplained neurological events in close relatives were discussed honestly.
- ☐ Allergies, chronic digestive disease, cancer and unexplained early deaths were discussed.
- ☐ Injuries or health problems that ended relatives' working careers were discussed.
- ☐ Fear, environmental sensitivity, dog aggression and inability to settle in relatives were discussed.
- ☐ Returns, failed placements and career changes from previous litters were discussed.
- ☐ References from owners of mature related dogs are available.
- ☐ The dam can be observed away from staged work, unless a credible welfare reason prevents it.
- ☐ The sire's health, temperament and ordinary behaviour can be verified independently if he lives elsewhere.

Family-health and temperament notes

4. Observe the adult dogs

- ☐ Adults appear physically comfortable and willing to move.
- ☐ Adults are safely manageable around ordinary activity and unfamiliar people.
- ☐ Adults can settle when no work is available.
- ☐ Adults recover after a harmless surprise.
- ☐ The handler can interrupt excitement and regain calm behaviour.
- ☐ The breeder describes both strengths and weaknesses without sales language.

5. Inspect the litter and breeder practice

- ☐ The litter is seen where it is normally raised—not handed over in a car park.
- ☐ The environment is clean, safe and divided for sleep, activity and elimination.
- ☐ Puppies have room for normal movement and age-appropriate exploration.
- ☐ Puppies and dam have protected quiet time and uninterrupted sleep.
- ☐ Puppies receive gentle individual handling and calm time away from littermates.
- ☐ Early experiences include safe people, sounds, surfaces, objects, travel and confinement.
- ☐ Hesitation is supported; puppies are not flooded, frightened or forced.
- ☐ The breeder keeps individual development, health and weight records.
- ☐ The breeder can describe each puppy across weeks, not only during today's visit.
- ☐ The breeder asks detailed questions about our home, trainer and fallback plan.
- ☐ The breeder is willing to say that a puppy—or the breed—is not right for us.
- ☐ Transfer age complies with local law and the puppy's welfare needs.

Questions still requiring evidence

Individual Puppy Observations

Record what happened. Avoid permanent labels such as “alpha”, “weak”, “perfect nerves” or “guaranteed working dog”. Repeat important observations and compare them with the breeder’s notes.

TIME / TIME SINCE MEAL

FAMILIAR OR NEW LOCATION

ACTIVITY BEFORE ASSESSMENT

PEOPLE PRESENT

6. Health and ordinary movement

- ☐ Bright, responsive and in appropriate body condition.
- ☐ Eyes and nose appear clean; no persistent cough or discharge.
- ☐ Coat and skin appear clean and healthy.
- ☐ Moves freely without obvious pain, weakness or lameness.
- ☐ No repeated diarrhoea, marked lethargy or unexplained swollen abdomen.
- ☐ Any concern is recorded for independent veterinary review—not diagnosed here.

7. Compare observable behaviour

AREA	WHAT HAPPENED? RECORD SEQUENCE AND RECOVERY TIME	REPEAT / BREEDER HISTORY
Social approach and re-engagement		
Food engagement		
Toy orientation, chase, grip and restart		
Safe novel object or stable surface		
Recovery after mild novelty		
Easy problem-solving and persistence		
Gentle paws, ears, mouth and body handling		
Small, solvable frustration		
Independence without social disconnection		
Come-down and ability to rest		

Do not drop pans, open umbrellas into the puppy's face, drag it across surfaces, pin it, scruff it, cause pain or continue after distress. These actions create fear; they do not reveal adult protection potential.

Most useful strengths / most important concerns

Collection, Red Flags and Decision

8. Records and practical information before collection

- ☐ Signed contract and copy for both parties.
- ☐ Pedigree and registration information.
- ☐ Microchip number matches the puppy and paperwork.
- ☐ Veterinary examination and treatment records.
- ☐ Vaccination and parasite-control details, including dates and products.
- ☐ Current food, quantities and feeding times.
- ☐ Normal sleep, elimination, crate/pen and handling routine.
- ☐ Known illness, injury, medication or adverse reaction disclosed in writing.
- ☐ Independent veterinary examination period in the contract.
- ☐ Breeder contact and lifetime return procedure.

STOP THE PURCHASE WHEN EVIDENCE DOES NOT ADD UP

Do not let travel, deposits, availability or an appealing puppy overrule a serious health, welfare, temperament or honesty concern.

9. Major red flags

- ☐ Guarantees that a young puppy will become a protection dog.
- ☐ Selection based mainly on colour, size, "dominance" or a grip video.
- ☐ Missing, unverifiable or incomplete parent health records.
- ☐ Refusal to discuss seizures, fear, aggression, returns or failed working placements.
- ☐ Persistently ill, shut-down, dirty, painful or poorly cared-for puppies.
- ☐ Adult dogs that cannot be safely managed outside staged protection work.
- ☐ No written contract, identification, records or lifetime return clause.
- ☐ Breeder asks nothing meaningful about the future home.
- ☐ Pressure to pay immediately or meet away from the litter's home.
- ☐ Advice based on pain, physical corrections, forced submission, flooding or creating suspicion.
- ☐ Claims that reward-based training makes a protection dog weak.
- ☐ Discouragement from independent veterinary or working-dog review.

10. Final decision after leaving the breeder

☐ Proceed to independent review

☐ Need more evidence / second visit

☐ Do not proceed

Why this decision?

WORKING-DOG PROFESSIONAL CONSULTED

VETERINARIAN / APPOINTMENT DATE

Evidence basis: American Belgian Malinois Club breeder guidance; FCI Belgian Shepherd Standard No. 15; OFA health-record verification; AVSAB puppy-socialisation and humane-training position statements; current longitudinal and working-dog selection research. Full linked references and explanations are available in the companion article at malinois-for-protection.com/blog/choosing-malinois-puppy-protection-training/.