

Why do good puppies cost so much?

By Stacey Venancio // Starsen Chihuahuas.
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A note about our prices: Our average pet puppy price is \$1500. Young adults and retired show dogs are a bit less. Some people have asked us "Why are they so expensive?" and we have heard comments like "Wow you must make a lot of money!" The truth is that we do not even come close to making a profit (or even breaking even) from selling our puppies! Chihuahuas have very small litters, many are born by C-section, and we spare no time, effort or expense to ensure that our puppies are healthy, well-socialized, and pre-trained. Either one or both parents are AKC champions and are health tested and registered with OFA for good patellas and hearts, and CERF for eyes.

We provide a guarantee along with lifetime support for our puppies. Showing, health testing, providing proper veterinary care, traveling to the best studs for our girls and paying stud fees, etc- all of this costs much more than the amount we make from selling puppies. We have not so far even managed to break even (or come close to breaking even!) but this is our hobby and we do it for the love of Chihuahuas. If we charged any less for our puppies we would have to quit. We would not continue breeding if we had to cut corners to save money on important things like health testing, showing our dogs and obtaining Championship titles on our breeding stock, using the appropriate studs for our girls, etc.

Why is it important to show our breeding stock? This ensures that the dogs we breed are as close to the standard as possible. If you want a beautiful pet Chihuahua that conforms to the standard with a pretty apple head, large eyes, and a compact body under 6 lbs you should get the pup from a show breeder. Show breeders also breed for good temperament (shy and aggressive dogs do not win in the show ring) and show breeders spend lots of time socializing puppies because they know a well socialized pup is a happy show dog. All of this also contributes to a great pet!!

Chihuahuas from pet stores and non-show breeders tend to have long muzzles, smaller eyes, deer shaped bodies with long legs and arched toplines, many of them have poor temperaments and most of them are much larger than show Chihuahuas. They are often much harder to housetrain and tend to have the stereotypical "yappy snappy" temperament that comes from not being trained properly at an early age/ not being socialized properly and/or not breeding for genetically sound temperaments. I cannot count the number of people I have run into that have pet Chihuahuas that weigh 15 lbs, but they were told the puppy would only grow to 5 lbs by the disreputable breeder or pet store they got the pup from. Showing our dogs makes us strive to conform to the standard so that our dogs look and act like Chihuahuas and not Italian greyhounds, toy fox terriers or miniature pinschers!

Why not just keep a stud in-house to lower costs? Because one dog is not going to be the perfect match for every girl we own! Because our goal is to better the breed, we look closely at all the virtues and flaws in each girl we will breed and then we search for a male that will best compliment her pros and cons. Unfortunately, the perfect male for each girl does not always live in our home or even within a few hours driving distance. Our girls have traveled all over the

country to be bred to the best match possible- from here in Rhode Island to Michigan, Oregon, California, Virginia. Stud fees have ranged from \$500-\$800 per breeding and additional travel costs have been as high as \$1000 per breeding. We also attend the national specialty every year in Chicago to look at the dogs and get ideas for future breedings, to network with other breeders and to attend the yearly educational seminar. All of this is very expensive, but cutting corners here is not going to get us closer to our goal of producing beautiful dogs that closely conform to the breed standard.

Health testing- there aren't many Chihuahua breeders that health test for patellas, hearts and eyes and then register those results with OFA and CERF. I'm willing to bet a big part of the reason is because it is expensive! CERF exam- \$35, Patella exam (minimum)\$30, heart exam (minimum) \$30, microchip required for CHIC number and positive identification of dog being health tested- about \$50, sending in all paperwork to OFA and CERF- \$45, this amounts to almost \$200 per dog. Most breeders have 10-15 dogs in their program; that amounts to \$2000-\$3000 for a small breeding program for something that is purely optional. We choose not to cut corners here and health testing is NOT an option for us, it is a MUST!

Veterinary costs associated with breeding- A c-section at the emergency clinic in RI costs over \$2000 and many times the litters that will need a c-section consist of only 1 or 2 puppies. During office hours it is about \$1100. Then there are x-rays, ultrasounds, progesterone testing (minimum for 2 tests is \$140 but we spent about \$600 for a female who ovulated late in her cycle and \$400 on another girl- this is per breeding), vaccinations, etc etc. One of our girls came down with an emergency uterine infection that cost \$1400 to treat last year. Veterinary care is expensive! In some areas of the country veterinary care is not as costly, but here on the east coast is the most expensive area in the entire country.

Why can some breeders charge so little? Well, if they don't show their dogs, don't health test, use the male sitting in their living room as a stud, have a 15 lb female Chihuahua with a wedge shaped head that is able to free whelp 10 puppies in 5 minutes or less, rarely go to the vet and/or feed the cheapest dog food they could find at Wal-Mart then yes, they can sell the puppies for \$500 each and even make a hefty profit- because they have not incurred any expense at all in producing them! But the puppy you get from this type of breeder may or may not look like an actual Chihuahua, may or may not mature to be less than 6 lbs, may or may not be healthy or have a good temperament, you may or may not be welcome to contact that breeder for assistance throughout the life of the puppy and you will probably know nothing about that puppy's ancestors. Your puppy may or may not have been socialized from an early age, may or may not have had a head start on things like housetraining, lead training, crate training, and may or may not have been vaccinated and dewormed properly.

If you are ready for a challenge and you are not picky about size, conformation or early training, why not just go to a shelter or rescue and save a life rather than support these types of disreputable breeders that only breed for profit and not the betterment of their breed? If you ARE picky about things such as size, conformation, health, early training, etc then please understand that it will cost a bit more for your puppy- but in the long run the initial purchase price of a puppy is nothing compared to time/heartache/vet bills, etc you can save by purchasing a healthy well bred puppy from a truly caring and ethical breeder.