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■ Dog expert Sharon has written a guide to choosing the ideal puppy to join your family.

Knack to choosing the perfect puppy!

THERE are precious few of us who can look at a young puppy and not go "Ahhhh" and want to cuddle it.

And, for many of us, take it home and keep it!

However, there are also few folk around who know more about dogs and puppies than Sharon Bolt.

She has talked about all things doggie on the Chris Evans Show, for BBC TV and radio, and has produced dog-training DVDs, CDs and e-books.

And yet, as she explains in her latest book, even Sharon got a shock when she first had new puppies in the house.

"I had an instant love for dogs and a natural affinity with them," she points out.

"My husband and I decided to get two puppies, believing two dogs would mean double the joy!

"We attempted to enrol them into a puppy class, but I hadn't realised how popular puppy socialisation classes were.

"I think I spoke to about seven different dog trainers, because so many of the classes were full.

By Craig Campbell

"The trainers all said the same thing to me: 'You've taken on real trouble.'

"I was shocked and asked why, and they explained that, because the puppies were blood-related, they would look to each other for direction before us.

"As they were males, they would fight with each other for the 'top dog' position."

It was the start, for Sharon and her hubby, of a long education in puppies and the many reasons why it is never as simple as just getting one (or two!) and it being all plain sailing.

"When looking for a puppy, I encourage you to use your intuition as well as the guidance in the book," says Sharon.

"Sometimes, it can become stressful, trying to find the 'perfect' puppy, and that can tarnish this otherwise pleasurable experience.

"Had I known that getting two brothers from the same litter was, essentially, a cardinal sin, it is very unlikely I would have the two bundles of joy I have today.

"Incidentally, the breeder did

not tell me it was not a good idea to buy littermates or ask me any questions about how I would care for them.

"In fact, he offered me a discount to take the two!"

Thankfully, Sharon found the time and energy to work with her troublesome twosome, and emerged with wonderful, loving dogs.

As she points out, the very first stage — going to look at potential puppies — has to be treated in a very precise way, too.

"When visiting a breeder, dress in casual attire and wear soft shoes such as trainers, rather than high heels," she warns.

"Puppies can easily get under your feet.

"If you are taking children with you, it is important that they do not shout or scream or run about, as this can be overwhelming and frightening for a very young puppy."

After all that, if you're still up for the challenge, it's time to go and find the perfect pup.

For much more advice from Sharon, get your free e-book of *That's The Puppy For Me!*, by visiting <http://www.good-dogs.co.uk/puppybook>