

WESTMINSTER KENNEL CLUB DOG SHOW AND THE YEAR OF THE SENIOR (VETERAN)

By Ted Slupik, with commentary from Daly Dodsworth

Attending the Westminster Kennel Club (WKC) Dog Show has always been on my wish list. This year I went with my wife, my friend Gail, and an amazing 13 year old author (with her parents) named Daly Dodsworth, who had recently won the DWAA 13-14 Junior Author Award. We would all be attending the DWAA banquet and the WKC Show.

Our interest was in following senior dogs, or veterans as they are referred to. This stems from the fact that I am on the Board of Directors for Lizzy's Fund (www.lizzysfund.org), a charity that benefits senior dogs. Only 3 dogs over the age of 7 have ever won Best in Show (BIS) in WKC's 143 year history. The WKC catalog wouldn't be made available until Monday morning so it would be a scramble to identify senior dogs that we wanted to see. We were hoping to find 1 or 2 that would be winners in any category.



Daly and her pal Rosebud, featured in her article, "Full Circle"

The perspective of a 13 year old's first time in New York and first time at the dog show made the whole experience that much more fun. Daly told me that when you are in New York, you need to be prepared for meeting just about anyone and be ready to talk to them. Daly met many great people at the DWAA Awards Banquet on Sunday night, and gave quite an eloquent acceptance speech upon receiving her Maxwell Medallion. She spent time with Jen Reeder, Laura Coffey,

Mara Bovsum, Carol Baker, and the guest speakers Jill Rappaport and Steve Dale. Everyone was impressed how thoughtful and personable Daly was.

After watching Saturday night's Agility Finals, we were ready for the main events to begin. We started out at 8:00 a.m. at Piers (92/94) on Monday morning. The Piers are where the Best in Breed (BIB) events are held during the day. Ultimately, the BIB competes for Best in Group (BIG) on Monday and Tuesday nights at Madison Square Garden. The BIS competition is decided last on Tuesday night.

If you were keeping score, you might think there was only one winner in almost 3,000 dogs, the Wire Fox Terrier named King. But there were many more winners as the fans all shouted out their favorites.

Just making it to the show is a win for many owners and handlers. Certainly, winning BIB or BIG is a very high honor in itself.

Some breeds have never been awarded BIS, including the Dachshund and Schipperkee. A Rough Coated Collie has only won once, in 1929 as a 9 month old puppy, the youngest dog to ever win at WKC. The dog nicknamed Dan, won BIS by outmatching nearly 3,000 dogs.

With our intent to focus on senior dogs, we first met George Burns (the long haired Dachshund) and his handler, Carlos Puig, even before the start of the Dachshund BIB competition. We learned that 7 year



old Burns had accumulated the most points of any Dachshund in the history of the breed. Carlos handled Burns for the last 3 years, and also Burns' great grandfather 21 years ago. Carlos said Burns was a dog that just loved kids. When he misbehaved, Carlos called the dog Georgie which the dog didn't like. Both Daly and I thought we had met the BIS winner early Monday morning. This would be Burns last run at competition. He'd be retiring after this show, no matter what. Well, Burns easily won the dachshund competition, and then went on to easily win the hound group on Monday night. He was the first dog in the "pool" for best in

show. So, we managed to find the best dachshund and best hound within the first 5 minutes of the competition at the Piers.

The crowds, noise and traffic of NY can be overwhelming to human visitors, let alone dogs.

Unbelievably, they remained calm in the bench areas given the chaos around them. Most of the owners permitted us to interact with the dogs during the day. In a benched show, you get to meet the dogs, owners, breeders, handlers, groomers, coaches, and family members. Some of these dogs had 6-8 people as a support team traveling with them.

My personal favorite breed in the show was the Rough Collie. In the herding group, two senior blue merle rough coated collies placed first and second in the collie group. The first place winner nicknamed Marilyn was the #2 dog in Canada. Marilyn's half-brother, Saxon finished second. Daly and I thought



Marilyn and Saxon

that Marilyn had a chance in the final herding group competition. Marilyn made the first cut but did not place for BIG. Collies have been advancing slowly over the years. In another 10 years, it will be 100 years since first winning BIS. Reminds me of the Chicago Cubs, but then again, anything can happen.

The final round for BIS consists of 7 breed groups; Sporting, Hound, Working, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting, and Herding. 4 of the 7 dogs this year were veterans. In addition to Burns and King, 2 other seniors made it to the final group. They were a 9 year old Sussex Spaniel nick-named Bean and a 7 year old Schipperke nick-named Colton.

So what I thought the event was going to be the year of the senior (dog) also turned out to be the year



of the junior (human, 13 year-old Daly). Seeing a kid going to the show for the first time, watching her photographing the competition, seeing her talking to the owners and handlers was a fabulous experience. After BIS, Daly told me that her favorite dog was Emily, Mara Bovsum's dog that she brought to the DWAA banquet. I reminded her that Emily wasn't in the WKC show but Daly said that that didn't matter to her. As we left New York on Wednesday, I told Daly she had become a rock star. She smiled at me and said, "I know".