

AKC's Proposed Group Realignment

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By now, most active breeders and exhibitors are aware that the American Kennel Club has proposed a realignment of its existing seven Variety Groups. What triggered the initiative is obvious. As more breeds achieve full recognition by the AKC and start competing in dog shows, our already large seven Groups will grow even larger – and some would say even more unwieldy.

By comparison, the FCI (Federation Cynologique Internationale), which governs international shows held in Europe and beyond, classifies its breeds into 10 Groups. While FCI classification has some oddball Groups – for instance, one entire Group devoted to Dachshunds – there are logical splits and reallocations available to the AKC that would ease the present congestion of having a Group ring full of dogs standing virtually nose to tail.

So how, exactly, does the AKC envision expanding our present seven Groups into 10?

Since the current Hound Group is already made up of sighthounds (Afghans, Greyhounds, Irish Wolfhounds) and scenthounds (Beagles, Bassets, Foxhounds), it would make sense to give each of these subgroups their own full Group status.

The Sporting Group could be similarly divided into two: Pointers and Setters in one Group, and Retrievers and Spaniels in another.

Many fanciers of the assorted Spitz breeds that are now spread among several Groups without apparent rhyme or reason (Norwegian Elkhound in the Hound Group while a close relative and fellow hunter, the Finnish Spitz, is in Non-Sporting, as are the Chow and Keeshond) have long wished for their breeds to be granted a Group of their own. Such a group, the Northern Group, has been proposed by the AKC. It would integrate the Akita, Alaskan Malamute, Samoyed, and Siberian Husky from the Working Group; the Schipperke, American Eskimo Dog, and Shiba Inu from the Non-Sporting Group, and the Swedish Vallhund and Norwegian Buhund from the Herding Group. In the past, when other countries have suggested moving the Pomeranian into a Spitz/Northern Group, the Pom community has been sharply divided – so no talk of reassigning the Pom by the AKC.

The Working, Terrier, Toy, and Herding Groups would keep their names and, by and large, their present breeds (except for those Working and Herding breeds that move into the newly formed Northern Group).

Finally, the Non-Sporting Group would be renamed the Companion Group. “Non-Sporting” has always sounded a bit insulting; a catch-all label and one that isn’t particularly accurate in the case of historically athletic and sporting breeds like the Poodle and Dalmatian. However, since just about every breed recognized by the AKC serves as a companion when it isn’t herding livestock, retrieving waterfowl, guiding the blind, or participating in dog shows, the “Companion Group” moniker strikes me as rather arbitrary and wishy-washy.

Four breeds would shift groups under the AKC’s realignment proposal: the Dalmatian would move into the Working Group; the Italian Greyhound would move into the Sighthound Group (they are already permitted to lure course, as are Rhodesian Ridgebacks); the Chinese Shar-Pei would join the Northern Group, and the Chinese Crested would move from the Toy Group to the Companion Group (which the American Chinese Crested Club membership is not at all happy about).

With many of the Groups reduced in size, eventual new arrivals from the Miscellaneous Class such as the Cane Corso, the Redbone Coonhound and the Norwegian Lundehund could be integrated and the Groups still wouldn’t be bulging at the seams. In the years to come, AKC might wish to consider a Molosser Group for the proliferation of exotic mastiff breeds currently included in the Working Group (and Miscellaneous Class). FCI already has a Molosser Group.

AKC Variety Group judges who will be “inheriting” some different breeds will of course be expected to attend seminars and get up to speed on the new arrivals.

Knowing how opinionated, stubborn, and resistant to change many dog people are, the proposed realignment doesn’t



sound like it can happen in 2010. However, the AKC has formed a Group Realignment Committee made up of some brilliant minds as well as judges who have officiated throughout the world. On paper, it's hard to dismiss their credentials and experience.

No parent club will appreciate having its breed hijacked by the AKC, as the American Chinese Crested Club has demonstrated. Let's hope strong-arm tactics are not needed and the AKC will move breeds in accordance with the wishes of parent clubs and not in defiance of them. AKC registrations have already been falling; this fragile economy is not the time to incite breeders and trigger boycotts.

Most fanciers see the reasons for the AKC's Group Realignment proposal, but that doesn't promise it will be an easy sell.

We will be watching with great interest.

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