

Amazing Year for Rare Dog Breeds

Allan Reznik

OCTOBER 28, 2009, 8:30 P.M. EDT

A friend and AKC judge just returned from the German Wirehaired Pointer Club of America National Specialty, raving about the quality of both the entry and the judging that made for an exciting and rewarding experience. Exciting because of the consistent high caliber of dogs that made it a competitive show; rewarding because of all the years she has devoted to the breed, hoping it would steadily improve over the generations.

It has been a phenomenal year in terms of the less-common breeds getting noticed in our all-breed show rings and earning top wins. Who could have predicted, for example, that not one but two German Wirehaired Pointers would have made into to the Top Five Sporting Dogs in the country for 2009? Not to mention two Wirehaired Pointing Griffons, both Best in Show winners, competing on either coast. A Field Spaniel is winning Group Firsts and two Welsh Springer Springers have each earned Best in Shows.

In the Working Group, the top two Tibetan Mastiffs are both Best in Show winners, both golds, and both serving as great ambassadors for this ancient breed throughout the country.

In the Terrier Group, a classic Irish Terrier is winning Best in Shows and just placed in the Group at Montgomery County, the world's all-terrier mecca.

English Toy Spaniels in both color varieties are routinely winning Toy Group Firsts around the country.

Among the Non-Sporting breeds, two big-winning Tibetan Spaniels are claiming Group Firsts regularly.

In the Herding Group a Pyrenean Shepherd has won Group Firsts and placements and is doing his part to make the breed better known. At least one Beauceron is winning Groups and Group placements.

These results are so gratifying to the stalwarts who have stuck by their rare breeds and worked so hard to gain them visibility.

Not surprisingly, it generally takes a high-profile professional handler to break through the glass ceiling with one of these breeds and receive an occasional acknowledgment in the Group. Other judges then tend to follow suit. We hope handlers honor and respect the breed standard, and present these dogs as the standard stipulates: no stripping and primping if the standard forbids it and dogs shown at a moderate, correct speed.

Over the years, some judges have proven themselves a little too eager to acknowledge a new breed and give it a Best in Show. A Bearded Collie was awarded a BIS the first day the breed became eligible to compete in AKC shows. Two different Cavalier King Charles Spaniels went Best the first day that breed joined the AKC Toy Group.

One suspects these judges wanted a slice of immortality; a place in the record books for making history. Good breeders, however dedicated, want only the cream of the crop to rise to the top with a Best in Show award, and not necessarily offered on the very first day. However, when a knowledgeable judge is astute enough to find an excellent specimen of a breed and then has the confidence to take it to the top, that is the greatest affirmation a breeder could wish for.

Let's wait and see how the "newcomers" fare in February when three new breeds compete at Westminster for the first time.

- Read more of The Dog Insider blog -