

## Judging Dogs on the Day – What a Concept!

*Allan Reznik*

April 3, 2009, 5:45 P.M. EDT

Two of the world's most prestigious dog shows – Westminster and Crufts – are now history, albeit recent history. As reports of both shows saturate the media, I find some comments made by a few seasoned dog people rather revealing about the current state of our sport.

While most of us were surprised and thrilled to see 10-year-old “Stump” the Sussex Spaniel return to the Garden and sweep the show, an attendee was quoted in the press as saying it was a “slap in the face” for a veteran dog to come out of retirement a week before Westminster to beat the current crop of nationally ranking top dogs. Really? And whatever happened to the notion of judging the dogs on the day, be they 10 months of age or 10 years?

Stump is no slouch on the campaign trail. He won the Sporting Group at Westminster in 2004 and was among the top dogs in the nation during the height of his show career. At this year's Westminster, he was in glorious condition with a beautiful topline and he caught the eye of many discerning dog people. Happily for the Sussex and his entourage, Sporting Group judge Bob Ennis and Best in Show judge Sari Tietjen were among those he captivated.

Stump's win – and the grumblings of a few dissenters – reminds me of one of my favorite dog-show stories. In 1957, the immortal Sunny Shay became the first breeder/owner-handler to take Best in Show at Westminster with her glorious Afghan Hound Ch. Shirkhan of Grandeur. Amazingly, this was young Shirkhan's very first all-breed Best but he went on to take many, many more, continuing to win top honors even as a white-faced veteran. This illustrious dog ruled the rings until he passed away at the age of 17. Fellow exhibitors would tease Sunny and ask when she planned to retire Shirkhan. As colorful in her language as in her wardrobe and demeanor, Sunny shook her fist heavenward, replying: “When you bast--ds breed a dog that can beat him, that's when he'll be retired!”

I believe Stump is entitled to offer a similar refrain.

At Crufts last month, transplanted Welshman Peter Green had the honor of judging Best in Show. When the brilliant Sealyham “Charmin” won the Terrier Group, escorted as always by his devoted owner-handler, Margery Good, the pundits began speculating. Would Peter, could Peter, put up an American dog ... and an American terrier no less, when it is this group with which the former handler has always been so closely associated? Well, guess what? It was no cakewalk for Charmin and Margery but in the end, Mr. Green judged the dogs on the day. What a concept.

If it's all about judging dogs on the day, then an exhibit's age, curriculum vitae, and place of residence have no business cluttering a judge's mind. How refreshing that we've started the year with two outstanding examples of just such judging.

- Read more of The Dog Insider blog -