

Why Westminster Is Top Dog

While not the largest in terms of number of dogs competing, Westminster is the most prestigious dog show.

By Allan Reznik

Q. Why does it seem like the Westminster Dog Show is the one people always talk about? Is it the “best” dog show?

A. Tradition is a large part of Westminster’s appeal. The live show you watched on TV on Feb. 11 and 12, 2008, from New York City’s Madison Square Garden, marked the 132nd year of the show. It is the second oldest sporting event in the country. Only the Kentucky Derby is older, and by only one year.

Westminster is also a champions-only show, so you know that every dog entered has already defeated many dogs of its breed to get there.

Because Westminster is a “benched” show, all dogs shown on either the Monday or the Tuesday must remain on the premises for the entire day. This gives visitors a wonderful opportunity to not only see the dogs perform on the famed green carpet, but also chat with the breeders and owners behind the scenes in the benching area . . . and, of course, meet all the dogs, up close and personal, look through owners’ scrapbooks, and find out what each breed requires in the way of daily care, grooming, and exercise. There is nothing that quite compares with a face-to-face encounter with an Irish Wolfhound that will get up on his hind legs and look a 6-foot-tall man square in the eye.

While Westminster is not the largest dog show in terms of numbers of dogs competing, it is certainly considered the most prestigious and important show in the United States by most serious dog people. Many famous show dogs are retired at Westminster because, after a win at the Garden, all other awards seem anticlimactic by comparison.