

Big Win for Retired Dogs

Read up on Stump, the 10-year-old Sussex Spaniel who left retirement in 2009 to win big at Westminster.

By Maureen Kochan

Photographs by Mary Bloom You just can't keep a good dog down.

Stump, the 10-year-old Sussex Spaniel who came out of retirement this year to become the oldest dog to win Best in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, was nearly felled by a freak illness five years ago.

Veterinarians at Texas A&M University saved the pooch from what turned out to be a massive bacterial infection that had traveled to his heart.

"It was miraculous," Stump's handler, Scott Sommer, told The Associated Press.

Miraculous, indeed. After almost a month in the intensive care unit, Stump, who had won the Westminster Sporting Group shortly before falling sick, grew stronger and returned to live the quiet life at Sommer's Houston home.

Until this past February, that is. Five days before Westminster, Sommer decided to give Stump, whose red-brown coat had lightened with age, one more chance at the prestigious title.

"He hasn't slowed down a bit," Sommer said. "I thought it would be fun."

Best in Show Judge Sari Brewster

Tietjen with Sussex Spaniel Stump

and handler Scott Sommer And the rest, as they say, is history. Stump wowed the crowd, and bested dogs almost half his age, including a Giant Schnauzer who was ranked the country's No. 1 show dog, a Standard Poodle with 94 Best in Shows under her collar, and a Scottish Deerhound champion named none other than Tiger Woods.

Sari Tietjen, the Best in Show judge, awarded Stump, officially named Ch. Clussexx Three D Grinchy Glee, the trophy. She was in awe of the floppy-eared, slow-gaited dog.

"He showed his heart out," Tietjen told the New York Daily News. "I didn't know who he was or how old ... I just couldn't say no to him."

Handler Michael Canalizo, who retired a 9-year-old Afghan Hound in 2000 with 22 Best of Breed prizes, said older show dogs like Stump have a unique edge over younger competitors because they're seasoned pros who tend to perform more predictably.

"It's like the same patina you get from a very elegant mature person," Canalizo told The New York Times. "They have a certain posture and confidence that you only get with age."

So will Stump, whose favorite plush toy is a Grinch doll, come back next year for another shot at the Westminster title? Not a chance, Sommer said.

"He's just going to lounge around and sleep in the bed with us," he said. "He really is retired this time."

Maureen Kochan is a DOG FANCY contributing editor.

To read about retired working dogs,
check out the August 2009 issue of DOG FANCY.