

## Opening Space

### A World Challenge in California

*Bo Bengtson*

Will sanity prevail or will the measure to impose mandatory spaying or neutering of dogs and cats in California (AB 1634) pass the committee hearing in July? I hope sanity prevails, but even if we don't win at this stage all isn't yet lost, as many of us have feared.

Getting a new law passed involves more complicated turns than most of us would have guessed. The good news is that if "our" side wins at any stage the bill is dead, and even if we don't there are several more steps before the bill is voted on in the Senate, allowing us more time to organize the opposition.

Frankly, I find the whole thing incomprehensible. If there is a pet over-population problem, and I think we can agree that there is, the way to stop this is to put obstacles in the way of those who mass-produce mongrel, pet shop and puppy mill puppies. If they were requested to sell pets with spay/neuter contracts and to accept a life-long responsibility for all the dogs and cats they sell, the pet surplus problem would be solved in no time. Shooting down conscientious small-time hobby breeders and dog show enthusiasts just doesn't make any sense. The former provide the public with healthy, well-cared-for puppies and life-time guarantees; the latter contribute to California's economy by spending millions on their hobby, helping to support the travel, restaurant and related industries.

(AKC estimates that an average show weekend pumps over \$1 million into the local economy, and a big one like the AKC/Eukanuba event supposedly pulls in about \$17 million. In other words, dog shows are good for the economy!)

#### Staying in California?

It may seem like a small matter compared to the legislation, but it's bound to be a controversial question if the vote goes against us: should AKC pull out of its commitment to hold the annual National Championship show, sponsored by Eukanuba, in Long Beach, Calif., on Dec. 1 and 2? On the one hand, the penalty for canceling the contract is huge (reportedly \$800,000) and the difficulty in finding a new venue on short notice enormous — on the other hand, what message does it send to California lawmakers if they tell us they don't want us and we still gather in this state for AKC's top event?

Let's hope this is a moot question. If the bill doesn't go through, the year-end date and the California location make perfect sense, and it's encouraging to find that AKC is making a real effort to upgrade the show and make it a worthy showcase for purebred dogs.

#### A Real World Challenge

A big step in that direction is the introduction, this December, of a new competition in conjunction with the regular show. It's called the "Eukanuba World Challenge" and will consist of a competition among top dogs from 40 different countries. Eukanuba will sponsor one dog (accompanied by two people) from the U.S., Canada, England and 37 FCI countries. Each participating country can select the competing dog based on its own criteria. The participants will be divided into three classes based on their geographic region: 1. Europe/Africa; 2. Asia/Australia; and 3. the Americas. One dog will be selected from each class to compete in the finals; the winner is awarded the title of "Eukanuba World Challenge Champion" and \$10,000, with \$3,000 to the runner-up and \$2,000 to the second runner-up.

Information about this new venture was first announced during a press briefing at the FCI Europe Show in Zagreb in June, but so many questions about it were forwarded to us at Dogs in Review that I contacted Michael Canalizo, Director of AKC Event Management, to help clarify a few things. Here are some questions and answers:

Q: The FCI has over 80 member countries, so which ones will be invited?

A: It is Eukanuba's intention to eventually invite participants from all FCI countries; this year the decision as to what countries may participate is made by Eukanuba, with input from the FCI.

Q: Breed standards may differ from country to country; which standard will apply at the World Challenge?

A: Each dog will be judged by the official standard in that dog's home country.

Q: FCI shows include many breeds that are not recognized by AKC. Will these breeds be able to compete?

A: All breeds recognized by any of the participating clubs are eligible for participation.

Q: What about participants from countries such as the U.K. and Australia, where pets cannot travel freely across the borders?

A: Owners will have to deal with applicable Pet Passport and quarantine regulations, but dogs from the U.K. and Australia have already travelled to the U.S. to be shown, so participation should not be a major problem.

Q: Since the Kennel Club (U.K.) has not yet determined if or how it will participate, how will the British representative be selected?

A: Again, details are being worked out at the time of going to press.

Q: Is it true that participants have to be members of the Eukanuba Breeders Club?

A: No, but they will automatically be inducted into the Breeders Club.

This is an incredibly ambitious plan which, if handled properly, may result in something as unique as a sort of Olympics for show dogs. Some questions remain to be answered (for instance, which judges are sufficiently familiar with all the different countries' standards and breeds to be able to officiate?), but we look forward to hearing much more about the World Challenge in the future.

All this, of course, is in addition to the "regular" AKC/Eukanuba National Championship show, and will no doubt help give the show a much higher international profile than it has had previously.

Let's hope that dog show plans are the most serious matters we will have to discuss in the coming months... Meanwhile, have fun with your dogs!

Bo Bengtson, Editor-at-Large