

## Bo Bengtson At Large

### Grand Champions and Title Shows

Below is a proposal sent to the AKC Board of Directors, which I thought might be of interest to Dogs in Review readers. — B.B.

Following are suggestions for change in two areas that many serious show fanciers agree are in great need of improvement. These ideas can easily be implemented and would, I believe, prove universally popular, increase entries and enhance the purebred dog show scene considerably without having any negative impact.

#### THE AKC CHAMPION TITLE

With over 20,000 new conformation champion titles granted by AKC annually (2007 total 21,431 champions; 2008 figures not available) the uniqueness of this title has become seriously undermined. In most breeds well over a hundred new champions are created annually, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for fanciers to keep track of who's breeding the best dogs and which stud dogs are siring the best offspring.

There is no question that the AKC champion title in most cases serves well as a basic tool for separating show-quality dogs from truly inferior ones, but it is also clear that it has become merely a stepping-stone for serious show careers, not the ultimate goal that a true "champion" title ought to be.

Introducing a superior title — a Grand Champion, if you like — would have great benefits for serious competitors who do not wish to indulge in the "specials campaigns" which involve winning as much as possible at every level every weekend of the year — a practice that places more emphasis on Group judging than this type of competition was meant to have, and is not attainable for most exhibitors for various reasons.

A Grand Champion title, awarded only to dogs that have won, for instance, a specific number of Best of Breeds at shows with major breed competition, would be both meaningful and desirable, giving exhibitors with high-quality dogs an attainable goal to strive for and helping return the emphasis of dog shows where it belongs: to the Breed judging.

The number of major Breed wins required for such a title would matter less (five? six? 10?), as would the specifics for the type of major entry required. (In either sex? Both sexes? Only 3-point majors? At least one 5-point major win?)

The result of introducing such a title would be that many high-quality champions that are now left at home would be brought back into competition, to the ultimate benefit of their breed. Clubs would also benefit from an increase in entries from otherwise mostly retired dogs.

I am aware that AKC has long maintained that only one champion title is necessary. However, that is no longer true, and since AKC in other areas of activity — obedience, agility, field trials, etc. — offers multiple titles for different levels of achievement there is no reason for not doing the same in conformation.

Since verifying the Grand Champion qualifications may be costly and time-consuming for AKC I suggest that this could be offset by making the title available by application from the dog's owner and/or for a small fee.

#### REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SHOWS

The success of the AKC/Eukanuba show has proven conclusively that exhibitors will support a unique dog show event when one is offered. Currently more than 1,400 AKC all-breed shows are held each year (2007 total 1,426 shows; 2008 figures not available). The average number of dogs exhibited at those shows was 943; only four of them had more than 3,000 dogs competing. Other than Westminster and AKC/Eukanuba, all the shows have the same official status, yet beyond those two most are not known throughout the fancy.

A large number of all-breed clubs work hard to organize high-quality shows in many parts of the country. These clubs deserve AKC's encouragement and would benefit greatly from being conferred special status, such as the title of e.g. AKC Regional Championship Show or AKC State Championship Show.

In practice this would be simple: AKC could allow qualifying shows the option of using this official title, with Best of Breed



winners at their show being able to label themselves as AKC Regional (or State) Winners.

Since AKC already has divided the country into 13 "point" divisions, the offer of hosting the year's title shows could go to the previous year's biggest show in each region. If that club declines, the offer would go to the next biggest, or to any other show that AKC deems capable of successfully hosting such an event. The same principle could be followed if it were determined that State Championship shows are preferable to Regional Championship shows.

Simply being able to offer an official Regional/State title to Best of Breed winners would ensure these shows spectacular entries and meaningful competition at the breed level. The host clubs should also be encouraged — even required — to organize as many educational and entertainment events as possible in conjunction with their show ("Meet the Breeds," etc.), in order to appeal to a wide segment of the general public. The local PR value of Regional or State Championship shows would be such that they could no doubt attract considerable media attention as well as sponsors.

It is my firm conviction that our sport would benefit greatly from the introduction of a champion title that requires a dog to have defeated major breed entries — including other champions — multiple times, and from AKC shows in all parts of the country being given official status as Regional/State Championship events.

I hope that AKC's Board of Directors, and ultimately the AKC Delegate body, will look favorably on these suggestions.

Sincerely,

Bo N. Bengtson