

Opening Space

“The All-Time Greatest...” — What?

Records don't matter, we're always told. It's the quality of the dog that's important, not the number of wins, everyone will assure you. That's true, of course — but if records are so unimportant, why do so many people spend so much time, energy and money on setting new ones? And when the wise and the old gather to reminisce about the greatest show dogs ever, how come it's pretty much always the dogs with big records — Saddler, Bang Away, Manhattan or Mick — whose names are mentioned most frequently?

Let's face it, records do matter. You may hear of less famous dogs that are supposedly as good and as great as the big winners, perhaps even better. The difference is that they haven't proved what they can do: nobody knows if they would shine as bright if their owners chose to campaign them extensively.

So let's respect the over-achievers for what they have done, and instead focus on the surprisingly difficult question of just who the record-holders are. No, AKC won't tell you, and there is not even any absolute consensus of what an “all-time top winner” record consists of. Do you just count number of Best in Shows? Only AKC shows or wins in other countries as well? Only all-breed wins or specialties? What about Group shows? And how far back in time do you have to research?

Most people agree that, yes, when talking about an American dog it's AKC awards that count, simply because they are (at least in theory) verifiable: “world records” are interesting but usually impossible to confirm independently. And yes, most people also agree that all-breed Best in Shows are what add up to an all-time record, although there's certainly nothing to stop you from claiming the record for Best of Breed, Group, Specialty Best in Show or any other wins in your breed — provided that it's clear what claims you make and that you can verify the records.

If you have researched old dog show awards, or even tried to confirm your own dog's record, you will know that this is not as easy as it may seem. For shows after 1983 you can, for a fee, get any AKC registered dog's list of wins from AKC: it's an excellent service and includes every single result in that dog's entire career, but you have to add up the totals yourself, and for a top contender that involves hundreds of shows. (One I just got, for a dog that placed among the Top 10 of all breeds one year, added up to 61 printed pages and 746 awards. It took me a quite while to count, and re-count, that dog's Best in Show total.)

Prior to AKC computerization you have to rely on annual statistics published first in Popular Dogs from the late 1930s and then in Kennel Review until that publication closed its doors in 1992. I have a complete set of those records, but even so it's possible that an occasional Best in Show goes unrecorded: an early puppy win or a successful post-campaign appearance, for instance — if a Best in Show didn't result in an annual ranking you literally have to search through every page in every AKC Show Awards issue ever published to find it. And that's only the all-breed wins: specialty records are even more difficult to confirm.

Furthermore, if you say “all-time” wins, you had better not mean just “as far back as I remember.” It was in 1924 that AKC first organized Breed, Group and Best in Show competition into the orderly process we now take for granted. Prior to that year, a dog might compete in, and win, Best in Show without participating in breed competition — sometimes even take the top award after being defeated in the breed classes. Both because Best in Show then was not really what we mean by that term today, and because AKC did not always publish the results, pre-1924 wins are best left out of modern “all-time” calculations.

You can, of course, ask if it's really the number of Best in Shows that provides the best measurement of how great a show career was. If a dog in the past was Top Dog of all breeds but a modern dog wins more Best in Shows, who's really the “all-time” top winner? The Boxer, Ch. Bang Away of Sirrah Crest, was Top Dog for three years in the early 1950s and won 121 Best in Shows; isn't that more impressive than most modern show careers, even though Bang Away's number of BIS is no longer a record?

Or should we take where the wins were taken into account? If so, no one has ever surpassed the record set a century ago by the Smooth Fox Terrier, Ch. Warren Remedy, who won Best in Show at Westminster three years in a row.

There are clearly many ways of looking at dog show records. They don't necessarily indicate who the “best” dogs were, but they offer a mirror to their time and have an obvious historic value. For most of us, it's difficult to relate to records of 100-plus Best in Show wins, but Dogs in Review will in the future present regular “For the Record” updates of all-time top

winners in different categories: for all breeds, in the various Groups, and as far as possible in different breeds as well.

Meanwhile, have fun with your dogs!

Bo Bengtson, Editor-at-Large

For The Record

Below are generally accepted figures for the top all-breed AKC BIS winners in each Group. Send comments to bobengtson@impulse.net.

All Breeds: German Shepherd Dog Ch. Altana's Mystique, 275 BIS.
Sporting: Black Cocker Spaniel Ch. La-Shay's Bart Simpson, 106 BIS.
Hound: Afghan Hound Ch. Tryst of Grandeur, 161 BIS.
Working: Doberman Ch. Brunswig's Cryptonite, 123 BIS.
Terrier: Wire Fox Terrier Ch. Registry's Lonesome Dove, 216 BIS.
Toy: Pekingese Ch. Yakee If Only, 127 BIS.
Non-Sporting: Standard Poodle Ch. Lake Cove That's My Boy, 169 BIS.
Herding: German Shepherd Dog Ch. Altana's Mystique, 275 BIS.