

Dogs Lose Weight Through Competition

A new dog weight-loss competition educates owners about how to help their dogs lose weight.

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Weight loss has gone to the dogs – literally. For four months, eight obese dogs competed in the Big Dog/Big Loser Weight Loss Competition, vying to be the biggest loser (of weight, that is!) by snacking less, exercising more and changing their lifestyle habits.

In the end, the \$2,000 top prize was awarded to Winnie, a 10-year-old Schnauzer-Poodle mix. Winnie dropped 7 pounds (nearly 25 percent of her total body weight), and lost 4 inches in her chest and 7 inches in her waist. Her owners, Bonnie and Larry Rauch, entered Winnie into the contest because they had lost a dog the previous year to obesity.

“I went into this competition to make sure the same thing never happens to another dog,” Bonnie says. “It’s still a challenge because Winnie’s a good beggar, and she still begs although she knows she can only have certain foods.”

During the contest, the dogs’ diets were changed to a high-protein dry dog food, and each dog took nutritional supplements. The dogs were allowed only low-calorie treats like green beans or some of their regular food set aside from their daily allotment. They exercised three times a week on an underwater treadmill in addition to at least once daily walks, and attended weekly obedience classes for additional exercise and socialization. Their owners were required to attend weekly educational lectures on pet health topics during the competition. Blood tests were taken once a month to ensure the dogs were responding well to the changes in diet and activity.

“To our knowledge, this is the only canine weight competition that has been this comprehensive,” says Dr. Anne Chauvet, the veterinary neurologist who sponsored the competition. “We wanted to demonstrate the power of making lifestyle changes to maintain a healthy weight, not just cutting calories.”

The second-place prize went to Tinmook, a 6-year-old Siberian Husky, who is still working to maintain the weight he lost. As a working dog, Tinmook put on a tremendous amount of muscle during the competition. He not only reduced his weight from 74 pounds to 62 pounds, he lost 5 inches in his chest and 9 inches in his waist.

Before the competition, his owners, Debrah Conn and Bryant Lai, used to pull him in a special carrier when they went bike riding. Now during cooler months, Debrah hooks a sled harness to her bicycle and Tinmook pulls her, she says. During warmer weather, Tinmook works out on an indoor treadmill. “He jumps on the treadmill as soon as we turn it on and goes by himself,” Debrah says. “We encourage him, and he will run for 30 minutes at 2.2 miles per hour. Before, he would just lie around on the bed.”

Dudley, an 11-year-old Beagle, took third place in the competition. Although he had already lost 26 pounds before the competition, he still weighed in at 43.5 pounds. He lost an additional 11 pounds during the contest.

Stephanie Householder, Dudley’s owner, says Dudley now is at his goal weight of 31 pounds and is staying there. “I still monitor what he eats, and we are continuing to walk,” she says. “Even though he is older, he acts like a puppy. He loves to go outside, and he likes to play with my new cat.”

- Find out more about dog obesity and how you can help your overweight dog. -