

The Battle for Best in Show

Meet seven top dogs in the running for Westminster's highest honor this year.

Nikki Moustaki

Posted: February 9, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at Madison Square Garden in New York City has been called the Super Bowl of dog shows. It's the biggie, the one that everyone wants to win. These canine superstars have the look, the walk, and the charisma to win the show, but they are still, above all, dogs. Here's the inside scoop from seven Westminster contenders, straight from the mouths of their owners and handlers.

Photo courtesy American Kennel Club

Am. & Can. Ch. Efbe's Hidalgo at Goodspice

Call name: Charmin

Breed: Sealyham Terrier

AKC group: Terrier

Age: 3

Owners: Margery Good, Richard Good, Sandra Middlebrooks

Handler: Margery Good

Hometown: Cochranville, Pa.

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Charmin hates being groomed, but he accepts it like a movie star, resigned to the fact that there is a price for beauty.

Typical show-day schedule: Snuggles with Marge, followed by exercise. One hour before breed judging, Charmin goes out for exercise and relief. Then his furnishings — the long hair that hangs off his legs and body — get a wash. Charmin lies down on his side for a brush and blow dry. Then up for finishing preparation, before heading to the breed show ring. Win! Repeat preparation for Terrier Group. Win! Repeat preparation for Best in Show. Win? Sleep in between. More snuggles with Marge.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: Charmin sneezed while the judge was examining his teeth at a show that was nationally televised. He did win the Group!

Most mortifying thing that ever happened in a ring: "While competing in the Best in Show ring, I fell flat on my face," Marge says. "Charmin looked at me like, 'What are we doing?' And we didn't even win!"

Favorite post-show meal: The liver pieces remaining in Marge's pocket.

Favorite place to sleep: In bed with Marge. It's such a tough life.

Favorite toy: His best friend, Babs, a Parson Russell Terrier.

General attitude toward life as a show dog: "Charmin shows for me 100 percent," Marge says. "When I ask for more, he gives more. Charmin embodies power and determination. He has a willing heart."

Motto: "I'm with Marge, I'm ready."

Photo courtesy American Kennel Club

Ch. Smash JP Win A Victory

Call name: Vikki

Breed: Toy Poodle

AKC group: Toy

Age: 3½

Owner: Ron Scott

Handler: Kaz Hosaka
Hometown: Harrisburg, Pa.

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Getting her hair made up into her show 'do.

Typical show-day schedule: 7 to 8 a.m.: Exercise, playtime, and feeding time. 9 a.m.: Start the grooming process. 10 a.m.: Rest period. 11 a.m.: Show in the breed ring and win. 12 p.m.: Rest period and playtime. 2 p.m.: Show in the Toy Group and win. 2:30 to 5 p.m.: Rest and play until Best in Show time. 5:30 p.m.: Show in Best in Show and win. 6 p.m.: Get a bath, eat, and play until bedtime at 9 p.m.

Best day in the ring: Going Best in Show on national TV in front of 22 million viewers.

Worst day in the ring: Getting totally soaked by rain while showing, several times. A Toy Poodle does not look her best when wet.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: While being shown for Best in Show, she leaped into the air waist high and snatched the steak out of Kaz's hand and never missed a step. She ended up Best in Show that day.

Favorite post-show meal: Steak and chicken. She has Kellogg's Special K for a snack during the day and loves it.

Favorite place to sleep: In her cage with her special pillow and several of her favorite toys.

Favorite toy: A spider squeaky that she likes to toss around.

General attitude toward life as a show dog: She is The Queen when she is in the ring. She loves the attention and the applause.

Motto: "Life without limits."

Photo courtesy Eddie Dziuk

Multi BIS BISS Ch. K-Run's Park Me In First

Call name: Uno

Breed: Beagle (15-inch)

AKC group: Hound

Age: 2½

Breeders: Kathy Weichert and Leah Bertagnoli

Owners: Caroline Dowell, Eddie Dziuk, Jon Woodring, and Kathy Weichert

Handler: Aaron Wilkerson

Hometown: Belleville, Ill.

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Hanging out on the grooming table giving Aaron kisses while he's trying to groom him.

Typical show-day schedule: Wake up early, potty, playtime, then a grooming session. Next, show for the breed competition, followed by more playtime, some touch-up grooming for the Hound Group ring, then some R&R before Best in Show. When the show day is over, Uno spends his evenings lounging in the motor home or going for a bike ride with Aaron.

Best day in the ring: Going Best in Show.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: When he won the Hound Group in Houston on the road to the Eukanuba Invitational, Aaron let him run out to the end of a long thin lead. Everyone — announcers included — thought he had gotten loose.

Favorite place to sleep: In his crate on his fluffy bed with a big Hollywood star on it.

Favorite toy: His stuffed frog.

General attitude toward life as a show dog: He loves every minute of it because he loves Aaron, he loves the show ring, and he loves the crowd.

Motto: "Life is good."

Photo courtesy Linda Krukar
Call name: Agador
Breed: Doberman Pinscher
AKC group: Working
Age: 4
Owners: Linda and John Krukar
Handler: Linda Krukar
Hometown: Easton, Conn.

Ch. Dabney's Phenomenon

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Agador loves to be brushed, and he especially loves to romp around while he's still wet after a bath! He grabs a squeaky toy and runs all around with it until he gets dry.

Typical show-day schedule: A light breakfast followed by a brief run, then he rests in his very large crate in the van until his ring call. After a quick warm-up gait around the ring, he plays games and does tricks for Linda until showtime. Afterward, it's back to the van to rest until the next ring. At the end of the day he plays ball, eats dinner, then relaxes before bedtime.

Best day in the ring: When he's in a humorous mood and likes to do his tricks unsolicited. He just starts doing them in hopes of getting anyone's attention.

Worst day in the ring: When he got stung by a bee in the Group ring. Since that day, he's been sensitive to things that buzz in the ring.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: As he gaited to the end of the ring and came back to the judge, instead of just stopping, he hopped with his two front legs off the ground. He couldn't stand still and just kept hop, hop, hopping.

Favorite toy: His stuffed Elmo.

Attitude toward life as a show dog: Agador loves the attention and the applause. He always looks for people with a free hand and pokes them for a pat. He also "talks" to the other handlers so that they'll give him a sample of what they're using as bait for their own dogs.

Motto: "Enjoy life to the fullest."

Ch. Coventry Vanity Fair
Call name: Carly
Breed: Pembroke Welsh Corgi
AKC group: Herding
Age: 3
Owners: Deborah Salow, Kerry Kirtley, Kevin Foist, Bill Shelton
Handler: Bill Shelton
Hometown: Devore, Calif.

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Snacks.

Typical show-day schedule: Arrive at show grounds. Go for a run, followed by a bath. Catch up on any loose ends of grooming. Show in the breed ring. Return to motor home and wait to show in Herding Group ring. Hopefully arrive at Best in Show competition. Best part: having dinner.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: When Bill changed Carly's nylon collar to a metal chain collar, and the judge asked them to go around the ring, Carly stopped dead in her tracks and would not budge — she hated the collar. It wasn't until the assistant brought the nylon collar that Carly began to move again.

Most mortifying thing that ever happened in a ring: When Carly was still a pup, she showed in the Best in Show ring with six seasoned dogs. A Maltese was behind her in the lineup, and she was awestruck by it. She never turned forward

during the entire Best in Show. "At this level of judging everyone else was perfection with this one lone Corgi puppy watching the dog behind her with great curiosity instead of facing head to tail," Bill says. "It was actually quite fun, but embarrassing at the moment."

Favorite post-show meal: Chicken.

Favorite place to sleep: In her basket in Bill's bedroom.

Favorite toy: A stuffed fox from the American Kennel Club.

General attitude toward life as a show dog: "Let's get on with all of this so I can have the food, please."

Motto: "Please, sir, could I have some more?"

Ch. Brighton Minimoto
Call Name: Remy
Breed: Standard Poodle
AKC Group: Non-Sporting
Age: 3½
Owners: Cindy Coggin, Don Rochow, Zuleika Borges Torrealba
Handlers: Christian Manelopoulos and Rachel Corbin
Hometown: Greensboro, N.C.

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Remy loves to go swimming, so she also loves to be bathed. She jumps in the bathtub and wags her tail the whole time you are shampooing her.

Typical show day schedule: 6 a.m.: Arrive at the show, and go for a walk around the show floor to get familiar with the surroundings. Three and a half hours before show time, grooming begins. After the show is over, another two and a half hours spent on grooming. Bedtime at 11 p.m.

Best day in the ring: She was perfect at the Poodle Club of America show this past June.

Funniest thing that happened in a ring: She loves children, and once we were in the ring waiting to show and a little girl was patting her. When we went to show, Remy kept trying to get to the little girl, barking and trying to pull to go over to her.

Most mortifying thing that ever happened in a ring: "I let a little girl pat her, and she must have been eating Cheetos or something cheesy, and she left orange fingerprints on the dog!"

Favorite post-show meal: French fries with ketchup — she won't eat them without ketchup.

Favorite place to sleep: She sleeps on a big bed right next to our bed, and she never moves all night.

Favorite toy: Long rope toy that she shakes and chews for hours.

General attitude toward life as a show dog: She is enthusiastic about everything. She wants to please us, so that makes her happy, and we try to make everything a game with a reward at the end. Remy always loves to show.

Motto: "In it to win it!"

Photo courtesy Monica Bowers
Call name: Madam
Breed: English Springer Spaniel
AKC group: Sporting
Age: 4
Owners: Howard Lorber, Don Snyder, Tracey Monahan, Diane HERNs
Handler: Robin L. Novack
Hometown: Jackson, Mich.

Ch. Karmadi's Madam President

Favorite part of pre-show grooming: Languishing on the grooming table for hours. No crates, please.

Typical show-day schedule: Up at dawn, bathed and blow-dried, repeat for Group and, hopefully, Best in Show. Yes, three baths a day sometimes. Bedtime is early and always on a hotel bed or a giant stuffed pink bed at home — fit for the Princess.

Funniest thing that ever happened in a ring: She's an eternal clown, so ... she makes us laugh constantly.

Most mortifying thing that ever happened: Nothing bad happens in Madam's world!

Favorite post-show meal: Steak.

Favorite place to sleep: Draped across the pillows and Robin's head.

Favorite toy: Anything stuffed! Fluffy dog beds are always a must.

Attitude toward life as a show dog: There is nowhere she'd rather be than in the ring, except possibly draped over the pillows occupying the top half of the bed.

Motto: "Life is good, and I'm living it!"

Nikki Moustaki is a freelance writer who lives in New York City.

- Read more about the world's greatest dog show
in our Westminster Unleashed section! -