

The Plott Thickens

Bone up on the history of four dog breeds competing for the first time at this year's Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

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"Something old, something new ..." goes the old phrase. This year, four new dog breeds to the American Kennel Club roster will be competing at the historic Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show for the first time. Since Westminster is a champions-only event, none of these breeds had a dog that had completed its championship in time to enter the 2007 show.

Photo courtesy United Kennel Club

Joining the Hound Group is the Plott, one of the coonhound family that has the distinction of being descended from German stock like the Hanover Hound. German immigrant Johannes Plott and son Henry worked their hounds on bear, deer, cougars, wild boar, bobcats, and, of course, raccoons. The breed remains a loyal and determined hunter.

Photo courtesy Allan Reznik

The Tibetan Mastiff, while new to the Working Group, is an ancient dog and the ancestor of many more familiar breeds, including the St. Bernard, Newfoundland, Great Pyrenees, and Chow. This giant flock guardian was turned loose at night to patrol the Himalayan nomad camps and protect the flocks of goats, sheep and yaks, as well as the women and children. This is a powerful, heavy, and well-built dog, aloof with strangers but devoted to family. The coat may be black, blue-gray, or brown, with or without tan markings, as well as various shades of gold, from cream to red.

Two breeds join the Herding Group. The Beauceron is the largest of the French sheepdogs. The breed proved a valuable sheep herder in the early 19th century, later serving in the area of protection. The Beauceron is a versatile dog, adept at herding, tracking, military service, and search-and-rescue work. Double dewclaws on the rear legs are a requirement; some dogs have multiple dewclaws on the front legs as well.

Photo by Close Encounters of the Furry Kind

The Swedish Vallhund is a very old spitz breed. It is believed that the Vallhund goes back over 1,000 years to the time of the Vikings. It bears a resemblance to the Welsh Corgi; canine historians maintain that during the 8th and 9th centuries, either the Vallhund was brought to Wales or the Corgi was taken to Sweden. This is an energetic and fearless herder and companion dog, versatile enough to compete successfully in obedience, agility, tracking, flyball and conformation.

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