

What's in a Show Dog Name?

Breeder and exhibitor Anne Bowes elucidates the complicated names of show dogs.

Show dog names can be overwhelming for people unfamiliar with the conformation world. Although those fancy names listed in a show catalog may seem strange to the uninitiated, to seasoned dog exhibitors, they can tell a complete story of a dog's origins.

The first word in the name is usually the kennel name of the breeder of the dog. This name is chosen when the breeder first starts breeding and is given to every dog produced over the breeder's career, which could span 40 to 50 years. The kennel name is often a made-up word that means something to the breeder, such as a combination of family names, names of other beloved pets, place names, names of other favorite activities and so on. My kennel name is "Heronsway," a combination of two family names, one of which is also the name of the birds we love to see flying by our home.

Students of a particular breed can tell you where a dog was born and what his background is just by hearing his kennel name. Many kennel names are very famous and instantly associated with a particular breed, such as Vin-Melca (Norwegian Elkhounds), Salilyn (English Springer Spaniels) and Covy Tucker Hill (German Shepherd Dogs).

The next part of the name is unique to that dog alone and there may be many reasons behind it. Often puppies are named for what is happening on the day they are born. A puppy born on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day might be named "Free At Last". A puppy can also be named after a combination of his sire and his dam's show names. In my kennel, Heronsway Daydream Believer bred to Heronsway Some Fine Day and produced Heronsway Day By Day. Day By Day's son was named, Heronsway Time After Time, a continuation of the repeated word separated by a preposition. See how much fun this can be?

No matter how fancy the name of a show dog is, he is probably called just plain old "Max" at home!

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