

## Can Your Dog be in Dog Shows?

**Find out if your dog could be a show dog.**

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When you watch the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show on TV, you probably know in your heart that the pooch on your couch is even more beautiful than those dogs in the ring.

A lot of people look at their dogs and think, 'If I just paid a little more attention to your coat and didn't give you all those extra cookies, you'd win,' says David Frei, American Kennel Club spokesperson and host of Westminster's TV broadcast.

Here are some tips for finding out if your dog is a candidate for fame on the dog show circuit:

Check off the basics. Show dogs need to be registered with the AKC. Plus, because dog shows are evaluated as breeding stock, they must be intact: not spayed or neutered.

Sit down with your dog and the breed standard. This is the blueprint that describes your breed's height, weight, color, head, tail and even toes. Judges select the dog that most closely conforms to the standard. A judge has an authoritative opinion based on a tremendous depth of knowledge of the breed, explains John Lyons, a past Westminster judge.

Go to dog shows. There are more than 1,400 all-breed shows held in all 50 states. Go to a show, and watch your breed. Meet the exhibitors (wait for a time when they're not working), and find out why certain dogs are considered top in their field.

Talk with show dog breeders. It's not a coincidence that the canine contenders for Best in Show at many Westminster Kennel Club dog shows are almost all related to past winners. For example, 2003 and 2004 Group winner Ch. Ale Kai Mikimoto on Fifth, a Standard Poodle, and 2003 Toy Group Second, Ch. Hallmark Jolei Raggedy Andy, a Shih Tzu, both have fathers who were multiple Westminster Group winners. Show dogs come from breeders who breed to the standard.

Learn more about showing. Visit the American Kennel Club website for all the information you need to get started, from a pamphlet called *A Beginner's Guide to Dog Shows*, to a listing of AKC events, to clubs and breeders in your area.

What if that dog on your couch just isn't show material? Any activity is great that's fun for you and your dog. It doesn't matter whether it's time in the show ring, obedience trials or agility competition.

After all, your dog will always be Best in Show — at least in your heart.