

## It Takes a Touch of Magic

**Winners unite showmanship and spirit in perfect proportion.**

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What makes a great show dog? Is greatness bred, or can an ordinary dog soar to the top? Can a special trait be a deciding factor? Amid the collection of champions at Westminster, what sets the winning dogs apart from the rest of the pack?

While there are heartwarming stories of house dogs becoming champions, the majority of dogs at Westminster are the result of years of conscientious breeding by knowledgeable fanciers intent on producing the best dogs possible. They're the cream of the crop, with quality abounding in every breed ring.

"We have all the great dogs competing every weekend in different places around the country, and this is one time all of them are in the same place," said David Frei, expert commentator for USA Network's television coverage.

No money comes with a Westminster winonly prestige. The show is one of the few remaining benched events in the country, meaning spectators can go where the dogs wait behind the stands for a close-up look at every entrant in the show, but the conditions are so crowded, with few provisions for the comfort of the exhibitors, that only the most seasoned, strong-willed exhibitors show their dogs.

The limited entry of 2,500 champions is reached within hours on the first day entries are accepted. Exhibitors and handlers scramble to enter their dogs, and they breathe a sigh of relief when they receive entry confirmation.

Obtaining a top-quality dog takes more than money, which can run several thousand dollars for a single animal, depending on its age and breed. Usually a breeder will ask for a commitment in writing to show the dog. Some will sell their show prospects only on a co-ownership basis, keeping control of breeding rights and showing activities. This can be advantageous for both co-owners, as long as they have a good working relationship. The new owner has a built-in mentor in the breeder, and the breeder has a good home for the dog.

Many of the most successful people in the sport have an artistic flair, complementing their love of dogs with an appreciation for beauty, breed type, balance and correct movement in a dog. All this shows in the way they work with the dog.

"We call it 'good hands,'" said Peggy Hogg of Knoxville, Tenn., a respected judge who showed many of the best toy breeds in the country for 25 years. "It's the feel of the dog that comes right from the dog to the handler. You even know the dog's thoughts. That 'feel' isn't something you work on. It's a natural instinct, and you either have it or you don't."