

## What Makes Westminster Different?

### **The importance of Westminster from a show dog person's perspective.**

*Allan Reznik*

Every weekend of the year breeders and owners exhibit dogs in all regions of the country. It is the yardstick by which we evaluate the quality of our dogs as breeding animals. We are thrilled when our dogs earn their championship titles and produce the next generation of fine breed representatives. We also enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded fanciers, seeing how our peers are contributing to the betterment of the breed. However, for the most part, we are competing against dogs from the same part of the country.

Westminster is one of the few times of the year when the top dogs of each breed gather together to compete head to head in the same ring. As a champions-only show, it attracts the very best the country has to offer. Spectators at the Garden include respected breeders, exhibitors and judges from around the world. For them to have the opportunity to see your dog in the flesh is a thrill. To have your nationally ranked champion invited to compete at Westminster is an honor. Sharing the ring with these other great dogs, many of whom you might be seeing for the very first time, makes your heart skip a beat.

As the second-oldest sporting event in America (only the Kentucky Derby is older, and only by one year) it is the tradition of Westminster that makes a win here so coveted. Everywhere you look, you see the icons of dogdom. Famous judges happily steward at Westminster, calling dogs into the ring and checking armbands. Such is the prestige of this event.

With all these top champions coming together in the same ring, anything can happen and often does. There are countless, heartwarming stories of underdogs that came to the Garden, in the company of owners and handlers who scrimped and saved all year to make the trek, and then sparkled when it counted most. The judge points to you, and suddenly you are destined to appear in the group that evening. Many owners bring their own hometown cheering section. An unexpected Best of Breed often prompts a hurried dash to Macy's for a glamorous evening dress in which to appear on national TV.

To win Best of Breed, Best of Opposite Sex, or to be singled out for an Award of Merit from an entry of the top dogs in your breed is the highest validation in our sport. We all dream of that fairytale moment, and pinch ourselves when it comes to pass.

There are many exciting dog shows, but truly, there is only one Westminster.

Allan Reznik is the Editor-in-Chief of Dog World and Dogs in Review. He has breeder-owner-handled many Cavalier King Charles Spaniels to their championships, and has been attending Westminster for three decades and counting.