

Dog Fanciers in Europe

European registries insist on soundness as well as beauty in breeding stock.

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North American dog fanciers may be surprised to learn that in Europe, where dogs are welcomed in shops, restaurants, and hotels, a widespread purebred dog fancy and huge numbers of dog activities are flourishing. For instance, in Finland (population 5 million), every fourth family has a dog, with the total number of dogs exceeding 500,000, and 80 percent of them purebred.

Presiding over all kennel clubs of Europe, plus most of South and Central America and Asia, is the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), the world's premier canine organization. Each of its 79 member countries has a national kennel club issuing its own pedigrees and training its own judges. Although FCI does not maintain pedigrees, one of its main mandates is to ensure that all pedigrees and judges are recognized by all members for the 331 FCI-recognized breeds. Each breed is considered the "property" of a specific country of origin whose breed standard is usually adopted by all FCI countries.

This means that the Chesapeake Bay Retriever and American Water Spaniel, for instance, use AKC standards, while Canada's Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever is judged by the Canadian Kennel Club standard throughout FCI jurisdictions. The FCI's Standards and Scientific Commissions work in conjunction with the breed club of the country of origin, translating each standard into English, French, German, and Spanish.

For all member countries, the FCI keeps computer records of the international awards and also maintains international kennel name protection, complete lists of those licensed to judge at FCI events, translations, and updates of various international regulations, as well as annual calendars of events.

Highlights of the FCI year are the World Shows, which take place annually in member countries around the world, with one major and several section shows. The principal World Shows can draw a staggering entry of more than 25,000 dogs.

Europe and Scandinavia offer a glimpse of member countries worldwide. Dogs play an important part in Norwegian life, and in a country of 4.6 million people the Norwegian Kennel Club (Norsk Kennel Klubb, or NKK) has a membership of 95,000 direct and associate club members.

Bordering on Russia to the east, Finland is a land of high technology, lakes, rocks, and muskeg. The Finnish Kennel Club (Suomen Kennelliitto, or SK) boasts a membership of more than 100,000. Dominating the middle is Sweden, with the largest Scandinavian area and a population of 9 million. More than 300,000 people are members of the Swedish Kennel Club (Svenska Kennelklubben, or SKK) or its affiliate clubs. The SKK sponsors many canine activities, and provides dog parks for agility and other sports.