

## History of Westminster

**Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show is the second-oldest, continuous sporting event in America.**

*Jackie Franza*

Around 1876, a group of sporting dog enthusiasts living in Manhattan decided to form a group devoted to dogs. Because they had been meeting in a bar of the Westminster Hotel, they named their group after the hotel, calling it The Westminster Breeding Association. Soon after forming the group, they helped put on a dog show in Philadelphia. The show was a success, so the group decided to hold their own show in New York. The club changed their name to the Westminster Kennel Club, and held the First Annual New York Bench Show of Dogs in 1877 in the Hippodrome at Gilmore's Garden in New York City. In 1928, the show moved to the newly opened Madison Square Garden III, then, in 1969, it moved yet again to the Madison Square Garden IV, where show continues to be held today.

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, held every February in New York City, is the second-oldest, continuous sporting event in the United States (the Kentucky Derby is the oldest). 2006 marks the 130th show. The two-day event, held at Madison Square Garden, can draw up to 2,500 dogs.

Westminster is a Champions only show, which means every dog competing has already received its American Kennel Club (AKC) breed Champion title (Ch.). It's also one of the only benched shows in the United States, which means the dogs remain on the show grounds all day so spectators can see the different breeds and talk to the handlers, owners and breeders of the dogs.

The breeds are judged during the day on both Monday and Tuesday. In the evenings, the dogs that won Best of Breed then go on to compete in Best of Group for each of the American Kennel Clubs seven Group categories (Sporting, Working, Terrier, Toy, Hound, Herding and Non-Sporting). On Tuesday evening, after all the Group winners have been chosen, one representative from each group enters the show ring to compete for the coveted Best in Show title.

The show awarded the title of Best in Show for the first time in 1907. The first dog to win Best in Show was Ch. Warren Remedy, a Smooth Fox Terrier. This dog went on to win Best in Show for the next two years, a record that still stands today. Six dogs have won Best in Show twice in a row. The last dog to accomplish this feat was English Springer Spaniel Ch. Chinoe's Adamant James was in 1976.

In 1999, two more records were set. At just over 8 years old, Papillon, Ch. Loteki Supernatural Being, became the oldest dog to win Best in Show at Westminster. He also becomes the first dog to win both Westminster and the World Dog Show in Helsinki. Additionally, Ch. Torums Scarf Michael, a Kerry Blue Terrier, and Ch. Stingray of Derryabah, a Lakeland Terrier, each hold the distinction of winning both Westminster and the Crufts Show in England.

Thanks to television coverage, which first occurred in 1948, you don't need to live in New York City to watch Westminster. The show continues to entertain and educate dog lovers all over the county.

- More Show Dogs -