

## This Year's Top Dogs

**With an impressive parade of likely canine contenders, Westminster looks to further its tradition of excellence in 2008.**

*Amy Fernandez*

Westminster is traditionally considered a showcase of professionalism. Although the competition is fierce, owner-handlers have racked up quite a few milestones beginning in 1907, the first year BIS was offered at Westminster. Owner-handler Winthrop Rutherford won the first of three consecutive Westminster Bests with his homebred Smooth Fox Terrier, Ch. Warren Remedy. A century later, this record remains unbroken.

Owner-handlers have gone the distance to BIS at Westminster on 30 occasions. Two have managed back-to-back Bests. John Bates began exhibiting at Westminster in 1898. In 1930 and 1931 his effort paid off in BIS wins for his English import, Wire Fox Terrier Ch. Pendley Calling of Blarney. In 1940 and 1941 Herman Mellenthin did the same with his breeder/owner-handled black Cocker Spaniel, Ch. My Own Brucie. In 1940, Brucie trumped the year's top dog, the incomparable Smooth Fox Terrier Ch. Nornay Saddler, on his way to Best. The following year, he not only managed a repeat BIS, his puppies captured WD and WB, wins awarded at Westminster until 1992 when it became a "champions only" event.

Reviewing the 2007 stats, it appears that quite a few owner-handled dogs are poised to give the pros a run for their money at Westminster 2008. No group has held a tighter grip on Westminster than terriers or comes close to their record of 44 BIS wins, most recently in 2006 when the Colored Bull Terrier, Ch. Rocky Top's Sundance Kid, stepped into the spotlight. This year's top terrier, currently ranked fourth in the Top Ten, is the Sealyham Ch. Efbe's Hidalgo at Goodspice, owner-handled by Margery Good. Sealyhams have won Westminster four times, but not since 1977 when Peter Green handled the Welsh import Ch. Dersade Bobby's Girl to her 51st BIS.

Currently No. 6 in the Top Ten and second in the Toy Group is the Pekingese, Ch. Pequest Persuasive, bred, handled and co-owned by David Fitzpatrick. "Tucker" is the son of American and English Ch. Yakee If Only, the 2005 Westminster Group winner. Although he was just starting his Specials career last year, he pulled off a Group Two at Westminster. Maturity could give him the edge this time around.

The real heavyweight in this year's Toy Group is "Vikki" the stunning Toy Poodle, currently the nation's top dog. Toys have prevailed at Westminster nine times, but it hasn't happened since the owner-handled Papillon, Ch. Loteki Supernatural Being, crowned his career with the ultimate win in 1999. Toy Poodles have pulled it off twice. Ch. Cappelquin Little Sister won Westminster in 1961. In 1956, Ch. Wilber White Swan became the first Toy Poodle and the first Toy dog to achieve this lofty goal.

But Vikki could do it. Already a top winner in Japan, she finished her American championship with three Groups and made it to Westminster's BIS ring last year. She currently has 72 BIS to her credit including the Poodle Club of America National Specialty. Capping this off with a Westminster BIS would be the second time around for the team of owner Ron Scott and handler Kaz Hosaka. They won in 2002 with the Miniature Poodle, Ch. Surrey Spice Girl.

Throughout 2007 Vikki has battled it out for No. 1 with the top Working Dog, the Akita, Ch. Redwitch Reason To Believe. She won the Working Group last year and judging by her subsequent track record, she also has an excellent chance of reaching the Westminster finishing line. Working breeds have won Westminster 15 times, most recently the Newfoundland, Ch. Darbydale's All Rise Pouch Cove, in 2004. An Akita has never managed this feat.

On the other hand, Doberman Pinschers have accomplished this four times, beginning with Ch. Ferry v. Rauhfelden of Giralda in 1939. Ch. Rancho Dobe's Storm made history with back-to-back wins in 1952 and 1953, and Ch. Royal Tudor's Wild As The Wind picked up the breed's last Westminster BIS in 1989. Ch. Dabney's Phenomenon, owner-handled by Linda Krukar of Easton, Conn., is currently the No. 2 Working Dog and ranked 10th overall. Now 4 years old, 'Agador' finished at the tender age of 8 months. Shown lightly for the next couple of years, he nonetheless racked up impressive wins, including a regional specialty at 11 months of age. To date, his record includes 27 BIS and 34 specialties. "We began showing him regularly last year and seriously campaigned him this year. He's mature, ready and we are really working as a team," says Krukar.

Standard Poodles scored two spots in the 2007 Top Ten line-up and also have four Westminster wins in their pocket. In 1935 the celebrated Swiss import, Ch. Nunsoe Duc de la Terrace of Blakeen, not only became the first Poodle to win

Westminster but his owner-handler, Mrs. Sherman Hoyt, made history as the first woman to do so. A Standard Poodle has not gone the distance since Ch. Whisperwind on A Carousel won in 1991.

Hovering at No. 3 in the Top Ten is the No. 1 Non-Sporting dog, Ch. Brighton Minimoto, last year's Non-Sporting Group winner and daughter of the 2003 and 2004 Westminster Group winner, Ch. Ale Kai Mikimoto on Fifth. 'Remy' is doing her best to uphold the family tradition. In addition to her all-breed accomplishments, her career includes WB and Best Puppy at the Poodle Club of America National Specialty in 2005, and BIS at PCA in 2006.

Another Standard Poodle, No. 2 in the Non-Sporting Group, stands at lucky seven in the Top Ten with 21 BIS, 51 Groups, and five specialties to her credit. Based on her show record and pedigree, Ch. Randenn Tristar Affirmation is a good bet. A frozen-semen puppy sired by the renowned Ch. Eaton Affirmed, she is also a granddaughter of Ch. Lake Cove That's My Boy, the three-time Westminster Group winner in 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Centered in the Top Ten line-up is No. 1 Herding dog, the German Shepherd, Ch. Kaleef's Geneva Aeval-Achtung. Last year she placed Group Second; her sire, Ch. Kismet's Sight For Sore Eyes, won the Group here in 2003. Only once has a Herding dog gone on to Best, but this also happened to be a GSD, Ch. Covy Tucker Hill's Manhattan, in 1987.

English Springer Spaniels have consistently been odds-on Westminster favorites. Last year Ch. Felicity's Diamond Jim became the sixth Springer to attain a Westminster BIS. This year's No. 1 Sporting dog is the English Springer Spaniel, Ch. Karmadi's Madam President, winner of 38 Groups, six BIS and ranked eighth in the Top Ten.

In ninth place is the No. 1 Hound, the 15-inch Beagle, Ch. K-Run's Park Me In First. Hounds have won Westminster only three times and not since the owner-handled Afghan, Ch. Kabik's The Challenger, went Best in 1983.

This year, the Plott, the Tibetan Mastiff, the Swedish Vallhund and the Beauceron will make their Westminster debuts, adding another element of unpredictability to the mix. Rebekah James, of Macon, N.C., will be showing Ch. Castleavery Storm Shimmer at Westminster 2008. "Tia is the first Vallhund bitch to complete an AKC championship. She finished in five shows. We imported her from Ireland and her sire is a multiple BOB winner at Crufts. This is our first AKC breed and so far, the experience has been very rewarding." She does admit to being a bit intimidated by the idea of showing at Westminster. "Many Vallhund people are new to AKC but we are really looking forward to bringing our Vallhunds to Westminster," notes Cheryl Rolfe of Lake City, Fla. Rolfe recently finished Ch. Starvon I'm The One. He is the 2007 Crufts BOB Vallhund and finished his AKC championship with four majors in three weekends.

Two months after recognition, two Beaucerons have completed AKC championships. Ch. Arbo du Chateau Rocher, bred, owned and handled by Karla Davis, of Woodlake, Calif., was the first, winning three four-point majors and two Herding Group placements within 10 days of recognition. "He is the 2006 National Specialty winner, the 2007 World Champion and currently ranked No. 1. I've been waiting since 1982 to show my Beaucerons at Westminster."

Fred and Susan Bass, of Independence, Mo., plan to bring two Beaucerons to the Garden: Am., Mex., International, Ch. of the Americas Ch. Sonata Mes Yeux Vigilants and Uros Mes Yeux Vigilants. "Uros needs three singles to finish but we're sure he will have them in time. We've dreamed of going to Westminster for years. We are poised and ready to be there!"

Amy Fernandez is Dog World magazine's book reviewer and also writes for Dogs in Review. She is the author of four books, including "Dog Breeding as a Fine Art." She is currently working on her next book, "Strategic Planning Manual for Dog Breeders."

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