

A Day at the Kennel Club of Philadelphia Dog Show

Find out what a day spent walking around this famous dog show is really like.

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Posted: November 22, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Photos courtesy Steven Donahue/See Spot Run Photography With more than 2,000 dogs in one place, it was with great anticipation that I took the train to the Pennsylvania Convention Center to see the 2007 Kennel Club of Philadelphia Dog Show and the National Dog Show on Saturday, Nov. 17.

As one of only six benched shows in the United States, this annual show gives spectators the chance to see dogs up close when they are not showing in the ring, giving audience members the opportunity to learn about the specific breeds, and see top dogs just being dogs. This year, spectators are able to watch the debut of four AKC breeds: The Swedish Vallhund, Beauceron, Tibetan Mastiff and Plott are among more than 150 breeds competing for Best in Breed, Group Winner, and Best in Show honors.

It always takes me by surprise to walk in the benched area and see this many dogs getting along with one another. They have fun with their owners, getting pampered, coddled and primped for the show ring. Many rest or simply sleep in their crates between showings. Although there is some barking, it's relatively quiet considering how many dogs are in one exhibit hall.

While walking in the benched area, the pressure on owners and handlers to have their dogs groomed and ready is evident. Blow drying the dense curls on a Miniature Poodle is serious business and neither groomer nor dog are to be disturbed prior to entering the show ring. Each hair must be perfect to present before the judge.

Watching the breeds show and seeing a judge whittle down the dogs to only those who will show in their group is interesting. In comparing a ring of Dobermans, a judge must choose the dog that best represents the standard for that breed. This seems a much easier task than comparing that Doberman in the Working Group ring to a Portuguese Water Dog or a Komondor.

Encouraged by announcer Wayne Ferguson, the audience's applause boomed throughout the room when each group took to the ring. With handlers trotting in and dogs jogging at the ends of their leashes, it was apparent that each one was a top dog.

So how does a spectator tell a champion?

Watching the judge walk along the lineup of dogs, I could feel the quiet of the audience as they waited in anticipation. However, after each dog is individually viewed by the judge and trots through the ring, sections of the room burst into hoots and hollers and applause for their favorite canines.

Taking a moment from his busy day, National Dog Show co-host David Frei gave me insight on how I could see a winner from outside the ring.

"There's a certain presence of a dog, just as in any athletic endeavor there is an air of confidence about them; a certain balance. Some dogs just present a picture to say, 'I'm a star,' but they have to back that up with performance." Frei says. (Hear Frei talk about some of his favorite dogs through the years.)

Frei added that a dog who wins should be a pleasing picture overall.

"Judging outside the ring, we can all do that", says Frei with a grin. "Putting your hands on the dog and feeling what's under that fur helps to bring both the art and engineering together to find that star."

The show will be televised on NBC Thursday, Nov. 22, 2007.