

## Handicapping Westminster Challengers

**Here are some dogs to watch during the 2007 Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.**

*Allan Reznik*

Part of the magic of Westminster is the "Cinderella factor." All the top dogs in each breed are gathered together to compete head to head.

Most are veteran campaigners, used to flying, eating at odd times, and being asked to strut their stuff at the drop of a hat. Having said that, dogs are dogs, and they can have an off day. Judges are allotted 2 1/2 minutes per dog to examine each one, and it is during that time when a dark horse can turn on the charm, show like gangbusters, and stare that judge in the face, demanding the win. That's when the magic happens, and upsets occur.

We'll be watching for those dark horses to add to the excitement of Westminster 2007. In the meantime, here are some heavy hitters to keep your eye on in each of the American Kennel Club show groups.

In the Sporting Group, look for "James," the English Springer Spaniel, more formally known as Ch. Felicity's Diamond Jim. With 112 Group Firsts to his credit in 2006, he and his handler Kelly Fitzgerald make a stunning picture in the ring, and are always a force to be reckoned with.

Irish Setter Ch. Jewels's Up Up N Away, "Windy," has been coming on strong, claiming 51 Group Firsts in 2006, always a glamorous addition to the Sporting Group and handled by Jeff Arch.

Basset Hound Ch. Topsfield Beethoven has been leading the pack in the Hound Group with 95 Group Firsts achieved in 2006. He and his handler Bryan Martin make beautiful music together and will surely be making their presence known at the Madison Square Garden.

"Fairchild," the scruffy-faced Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen (or PBGV) is an absolute crowd pleaser, who adores her handler Greg Strong. Together, they have accounted for 86 Group Firsts. She loves to show and is a joyful addition to the Hound Group.

Two more girls are vying for top honors in the Working Group. The Boxer Ch. Bayview Some Like It Hot, or "Monroe," handled by Michael Shepherd, accounted for 96 Group Firsts in 2006.

The Akita "Macey," Ch. Redwitch Reason to Believe, is already the top-winning female of her breed, with 47 Group Firsts. A striking silver fawn with white trim, she is owned by Roger Rechler and handled by Laurie Jordan-Fenner.

Two of the smaller and less common terrier breeds have amassed enviable winning records. The Dandie Dinmont Terrier Ch. Hobergays Fineus Fogg, or "Harry," an Australian import, ended 2006 as the Top Dog all breeds in the country, with 106 Group Firsts. He is shown by handler Bill McFadden.

The Sealyham Terrier Ch. Stonebroke Right On The Money is aptly named. "Ben-Low" and his handler, Gabriel Rangel, ended 2006 with 85 Group Firsts. Ben-Low and Harry are frequently dividing the spoils between them.

The glamorous white Toy Poodle "Vikki," Ch. Smash JP Win A Victory, is a Japanese import, owned by Ron Scott, and shown by expert Poodle handler Kaz Hosaka. She ended 2006 with 108 Toy Group Firsts.

Ch. Frodun's Friar Tuck, or "Tucker," the Pug, has also had a great year, accumulating 62 Group Firsts in 2006, shown by his devoted handler Esteban Farias.

In the Non-Sporting Group, Ch. Merry Go Round Mach Ten, or "Boomer," a Dalmatian, gaited into the top spot at Westminster last year, shown by Michael Scott. With 81 Group Firsts captured in 2006, will he make it two years in a row?

The Bichon Frise Ch. PaRay's Paragon, "Jake," has been another consistent performer, claiming 76 Group Firsts in 2006. This animated power puff is handled by his breeders Paul Flores and Tray Pittman.

In the Herding Group, Old English Sheepdog Ch. Bugaboo's Big Resolution, "Smokin," has had a great year, including a

Group First at Westminster in February. He has accumulated 90 Group Firsts and is shown by Colton Johnson, son of Smokin's breeder-owners, Doug and Michaelanne Johnson.

Another top performer in this group is the German Shepherd Dog Ch. Kaleef's Geneva Aeval-Achtung, owned by Janet Lange and Roger Rechler, and handled by his breeder James Moses. "Geneva" accounted for 73 Group Firsts in 2006.

While any dog who gets into the ring has a chance to win, track this handful as they move from the breed judging, to the group ring, and possibly into Tuesday night's culmination – the Best in Show competition.

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