

## *What goes on at a dog show?*

By Karen Peak

### West Wind Dog Training

Dogs in some rings that are definitely the same breed, dogs in others that are not. Some dogs are just running in circles while others are doing some form of work. So many dogs look alike. How does the judge tell the difference? Let us take a moment and unwrap the riddle of the typical dog show.

Dog shows were developed for people to highlight breeding stock and show off what they produce. Each breed has a Standard of Perfection and within that Standard, is what the ideal specimen of the breed should look like. The standard covers everything from size, coat, color, ears, eyes, and markings to temperament. Though many dogs may loosely fall within the standard, they may not "cut it" in the show ring. A trained eye can tell the difference between a dog that has "it" and one that does not.

Dog shows work as a pyramid. The bottom is the "classes". Dogs will start in one of several classes: Puppy 6-9 Months; Puppy 9-12 Months; Puppy 12-18 Months; Novice; Bred By Exhibitor; American Bred; Open. These classes are divided by gender so all males will compete then all the females. None of the "class dogs" will be a champion. It is by beating dogs in the classes that points are earned towards that Champion title. The winner of each class will go back in the ring and the Best of Winners will be decided. After Winner's Dog (male) and Winner's Bitch (female) are chosen, these two dogs will return to the ring and now compete against Champions of record for Best of Breed.

Class judging is done dog against dog and dog against the Standard. What dog in each class and then what dog is the Best of Breed Competition is closest to the breed standard as compared to the other dogs? Does one dog have a slightly funny gait that may make it place down the list than a dog whose head may not be quite perfect? What does each dog have that another dog does not to help put it closest to the ideal dog for that breed? These are some of the things that a judge considers when looking at each dog.

Now that the various Best of Breeds are chosen comes the Group. Breeds are put into groups based on what they do. In the American Kennel Club, there are seven groups: Sporting, Hound, Working, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding. (There is also a Miscellaneous Class for breed pending full recognition; however, the Miscellaneous class does not go for Best in Show). For example, the Herding Group is dogs of various breeds that were bred to work livestock. The Terrier Group is the various Terrier breeds. Here, the judge has to decide what dog comes closest to its particular standard as compared to the other breeds and their standards. Is the Rough Collie closer to its standard than the Belgian Shepherd is to its? From the various breeds in the Group will come the Group Winner.

Now we come to the biggie! Best in Show! The seven group winners go back into the ring to compete. As with the Group, the dogs are judged based on how close they are to

their individual standard as compared to the others. It can sometimes come down to which dog just seems to "want" the win. What dog is really enjoying himself and playing up on that day? The dog that fits his standard the closest and has that "I can win" attitude will become Best in Show.

Now what about those other rings – you know the ones with jumps and stuff? Well, those are the Obedience Rings. Obedience dogs do not have to be show quality – they have to be purebred and registered to show (the United Kennel Club will allow crossbreeds to compete in Obedience). Obedience has three levels: Novice, Open, and Utility. Each dog competes against a set of points for each exercise. A dog must gain at least 50% of the points per exercise and have a final score of 170 or better with a perfect score being 200. If a dog can do this, he has earned a qualifying leg. After three legs, the dog can move to the next level of competition.

Dogs can obtain various Obedience Titles: Companion Dog (after completing three Novice Legs); Companion Dog Excellent (after completing three Open legs); Utility Dog (after completing three Utility legs); Utility Dog Excellent (for UD dogs who have qualified in both Open and Utility at ten Obedience Trails) and finally Obedience Trail Champion.

I hope that this has clarified what goes on at dog shows for you. Dog shows seem insane, but it is an organized chaos. Next time you visit a show, see if you can figure out what is going on in each ring. In addition, do not forget that catalog! It will let you know when what is going on!