

Chinese Sharpei, aggressive fighting dog or peaceful couch potato? A breed with an extensive history, near extinction and now a popular family dog. The road to its current status has been long and rocky and of course we still have a long way to go.

The current breed is descended from a few dogs saved from China by Matgo Law and sent to America to keep the breed alive. We therefore can trace out lines back to a few lucky survivors of the change in political structure in China with the rise of Chairman Mao. But what a long way we have come!

To the new breeder/exhibitor it can be quite daunting to look at the standard and see so much variety - Horsecoat or Brushcoat, tail sets that can vary considerably, dilute colours or traditional red fawn with black faces. The list goes on and on. The only constant is the dog's demeanor as aloof to strangers yet an extremely loyal family dog that can lead to the contradiction in the opening heading.

The breed has gone ahead in leaps and bound and nowhere is this more evident than in the USA where we have Multiple Best in Show exhibits and a Group 4 at Westminster this year. As part of my love for the breed and a desire to improve my knowledge and improve my lines I have over the past 3 years attended the Chinese Sharpei Club of America's National Specialty. In 2000 we had fun in Florida, last year we were sleepless in Seattle and this year we were off to Minneapolis in the Mid West of the country. What a gathering there is! Nearly 400 Sharpei descend on the hotel and the rooms and corridors are alive with the sound of dogs. What a difference to be welcomed to a hotel with your dog. Being allowed up to 4 dogs in the room and they must be crated only when you are not in the room. In the parking area, huge RV's with every convenience for those who have driven across America for this annual event.



One of the many vendors at the show site

What a showcase the event is for the qualities of the Sharpei. First day starts with obedience, yes you read correctly obedience! The dogs just love to please and their ability to perform in the ballroom of the hotel on plastic wrap covering the carpet is exceptional. Add to this throng of watching exhibitors and we soon realise what exceptional dogs these are.



High in Trial Ch Windquest Simply Irresistible CD CGC

CHINESE SHARPEI

Sue Davis

Wrinklespar Sharpei

This year a first for High in Trial as the winner is an AKC Champion male, still intact! Given that the dogs were competing on flooring that the previous evening had a multitude of dogs including bitches in season on it, you can appreciate the excitement of the dog's owner/handler.

Following obedience is the annual Futurity and Maturity classes. Highly popular as there are large cash prizes, this year there were 50 Dogs and 53 Bitches entered in Futurity and 27 Dogs and 31 bitches entered in Maturity. Grand Futurity winner was Kushi Kiao's Put On Da Red Light A Horsecoat Bitch. And Grand Maturity winner was Ch Margem's Crunche Cookie a Brushcoat bitch. Interestingly at Nationals the breed is split by coat into Brushcoat and Horsecoat. It has long been recognised that both coat types have quite different structure and while Horsecoats have previously suffered a decline in popularity they are well on the way to making a substantial comeback.

In Australia we are also seeing a small resurgence in the dedicated breeders returning to horsecoats, the original Sharpei, in their breeding program. With separate classes it is pleasing to note how well the horsecoats have improved with many horsecoats winning substantial number of mixed classes.



Grand Futurity Winner
Kushi Kaio Put On Da Red Light

The International is a highlight of the week that is not to be missed. The top 25 Sharpei are invited to partake in a competition where each dog is judged individually by 3 mystery (until the comp begins) judges. One judge Mrs Judy Dorough was seated at our table and previous to the announcement had fielded many questions about whether she had been asked to judge. Of course when she was announced as a judge she received a ribbing from us as she is not known for keeping secrets that well! Judy was more nervous at facing her daughter on her return at the end of the week than the judging ahead of her! Each judge is asked to score each exhibit and is given specific point guidelines. A dog can receive a maximum of 400 pts from each judge. While the judging is being conducted the audience is partaking of a 3-course banquet and of course we all dress to the nines. This year's winner was Ch Elite's It's Only Make Believe.

Author far left with
Invitational judge
Mrs Judy Dorough
5th from left



The next 2 days see the regular classes with dogs on Thursday and bitches on Friday. Winners dog was chosen from 96 entries and winners bitch from 135 entries. Best of Winners was Ma-Roo's Roe-Da-O Drive

Each afternoon saw the highly popular Veteran classes. With the ballroom packed, each veteran was given a highly emotive and sustained round of applause, and didn't the dogs just love it. At last they were back in the ring, tails wagging, heads held high. There was hardly a dry eye in the place. To finish each day off was Stud Dog on Thursday and then Brood bitch on Friday. Into the ring in groups of 3-stud dog with 2 get - a great way to see the breeding programs and how they are improving. This year it was a special treat for me as I was required to help with handling one of the get for a dear friend and breeder of my two imported stud dogs. Nerves a jangling into the ring on a very pretty creme bitch of just 6 months behind the creme stud dog and one of his creme male get. What a stunning group we must of looked! As the owner of the bitch was also handling with another group there was much frantic changing of handlers so she could present her bitch in a manner befitting! At last the final cuts were made and as both groups that I was involved in made the cut I was required to handle in the final. I ended up on my favourite, the young creme bitch. Now the owner is a professional handler so I was happy to stand her and let her "show". At least that's what I thought was all I had to do. As the judge went around the ring evaluating each group he then decided to move each of the youngest get! Oh my god! That meant me and to make it worse I was the first one up! With the breeders eyes boring into my back and the Owner holding her breath off I set. Well let's just say that no professional handlers are in fear of losing work! Back to my place in the group I wasn't game to look at anyone. Please let the earth swallow me! Worse was yet to come. Another cut to be made. Our group asked to stand back against the ring ropes. Damn! Looks like we are the "dump" group. The other group from my breeder was also pushed back. That left 4 groups against the fence and 3 groups in the centre. Then the 3 centre groups were dismissed. We were the

keepers! Now set the dog up again. Please little baby stand still! Around the groups the judge goes again. By this stage I am ready to give up dog showing forever. The puppy can feel my tenseness and is getting fidgeting. At last places are awarded. 1st place ...US!! despite the dodgy handler on the end of the line! All is forgiven as cheers and shouts erupt. To finish off our other group gets 3rd place! What a day - lead me to the bar!

Saturday is the last day of the show with the grand finale. Best of Breed. With 113 dogs entered, 65 males and 48 females, it was going to be a long day! Each and everyone of these competitors is a Champion and there were many Best in Show representatives present.

How special it is to see so many quality specimens in the ring together and not a single bad tempered moment from either the dogs or the handlers! All the males entered the ring and were split into groups of 10. Then all the bitches did the same. As each group was then judged, cuts were made and dogs kept to be judged again.

Eventually the final selection was made and from this group was selected Best of Breed* Ch Asia's Toontowne Northern Lights, Best Opposite Ch Shenanigans Storm Surge, Best Veteran Ch Elite's Cadillac Style, Best of Winners Ma-Roo's Roe-Dae-O Drive and 6 Awards of Merit.



Best of Breed
Ch Asia's Toontowne Northern Lights

The day finished with a Banquet and fund raising auction with the proceeds going to research into some of the inherited diseases with hopes of finding a cure.

A wonderful week was had by all exhibitors and visitors. Friendships renewed and new ones made. As always I was made to feel very welcome, and of course as the only "Aussie" I was continually asked whether I knew Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Man!

The events of September 11th have made the flights more restrictive and it is a very long way but the welcome I received made it all worthwhile.

If you really want to learn more about your breed then a visit to a National event of this size and calibre is well worthwhile. The social side alone is not to be missed! Here's looking forward to Nationals next year in Houston Texas!



Invitational Winner
Ch Elite's It's Only Make Believe