

FROM GEOFF CORISH IN THE UK: CRUFTS

The highlight in the UK show calendar is, of course, Crufts; without doubt the largest dog show in the world. As a visitor you will love it, but as an exhibitor it can be hell to try and show dogs and deal with the huge crowds that appear from nowhere. The show is held in Birmingham at the National Exhibition Centre and takes up five huge halls. The entry this year was over 24,000 dogs and it attracted over 120,000 visitors, so this gives you some idea of how huge this show really is. You may think that only showdogs are catered for but in fact there is obedience, agility, fly-ball competition and gamekeepers classes. Anything remotely to do with dogs and Crufts has it. For the general public there is Discover Dogs; an area set aside where each breed has its own booth and is manned by breed enthusiasts who will explain and educate the public in whatever breed they may be thinking of acquiring. If you are interested in shopping, you would be in seventh heaven here because there are literally hundreds of trade stands selling everything and anything to do with dogs and more besides.

The first day of Crufts was Terriers and Hounds. For me it was a busy day. With two Kerries, a Skye and a Sealyham in another hall to contend with, it was not going to be easy! However, the day was good for us with BOB in Kerry Blues with Tunde Bayou, his third Crufts BOB (he is, of course, Scarf Michael's younger brother); DogCC in Sealyhams with Ch Pindaric Welsh Dragon and BitchCC and her title to 9-year-old Skye Terrier Am/Int Ch Finnsky Xit. So all in all, not a bad day.

Terriers in the UK have always been strong and also popular with overseas buyers; the US was out in force looking and also a couple of US handlers as well. The Norfolk ring was jam-packed, of course, with the famous US owned, Swedish bred bitch whose owner lives in the UK and is handled by a Welshman now living in the USA - hope you got that. Anyway, you will already know that Ch/Am Ch Cracknor Cause Celebre won BOB and the Group, handled by Peter Green. Close on his heels was another US dog, the Smooth FT Am Ch Sunrise Rascal Fair, a really classy dog and who many thought pushed the Norfolk all the way. Believe it or not, there was another US raider, the Airedale Am Ch Greenfield's Celtic Legend, handled by Californian Gabriel Rangel, but to make sure it wasn't a clean sweep for the Americans, Group 4 went to the German Skye Int/German/Dutch/Bell/Lux/Port/Am Ch Thunderstorm of Morningsky.

Hounds were a different affair with not as much quality as we have seen in previous years. This can happen and some Groups are stronger than others. Last year's Hounds were just not as good as they have been previously. Anyway to top the Group was the Beagle male Dyalynne Ryan's Gold, bred in the famous kennel of the Spavins but now owned by Jill Peak, a long time Beagle breeder. This dog had previously been sold as a pet along with a bitch from Jill but then problems arose in the household and they both came back to her and the rest is history, as they say. Second in the Group was also new to top honours, with Fran Mitchell's Long Haired Dachshund Bronia Monte Cristo who gained his title on the day, I thought looking fabulous and just a little unlucky not to go one further! Third was a previous Crufts Group winner with Anne MacDonald's Saluki Ch Mabrooka Jayid and in fourth another Sighthound, the Deerhound Greyfax Guinevere.

The second day saw the more sedate Toys and Utility breeds. Last year's top dog all breeds was the Bichon Frise Eng/Am Ch Paray's I Told You So and interest was high around his own ring. To say there was a gasp when judge Mrs Pat Farmer 'Simway' placed him fourth in his class would be an understatement! Crufts has been called the graveyard of top dogs in the past and this decision would add weight to that description. Topping the Group under Feffie Somerfield was the gorgeous red Smooth Chihuahua Ch Dachidas Master Angel, owned by Carol Davies but always handled by her daughter Aimee. I gave him one of his Best in Shows and think he is wonderful. Group 2 was another overseas dog in the Papillon Ch/Int/Ger/Bel/Dutch/Lux Ch Antony, a beautiful black and white dog whose ears and fringing were just fabulous. Third was the super Smooth Griffon Ch Donzeata Royal Tapestry and fourth another overseas dog in the Maltese Am Ch Divines I'm A Phantasy.

In the Utility Group, the hot favourite was young Melanie Harwood's black Min Poodle Ch Minarets Secret Assignment as the Group judge had made him BIS at a Championship show the year before. But it was not to be, with the Group going to the Japanese Shiba Inu Ch Vormund I'm Marnie, with the Min Poodle in second, third going to Judy Franks' Shih Tzu Ch Hashanah Hot Shot and fourth to the German Spitz Klein Ch Terendak Bubble Baileys who has figured in this quite a lot last year.

The third day is completely taken over by the Gundogs; such is the entry for this Group and by now everyone who elected to stay all three days is exhausted beyond belief. In fact, the top entry for the whole show comes from this Group with Golden Retrievers, followed by Labs and then Irish Setters. But this time the Group went to Penny Williams' English Setter Sh Ch Bournehouse Royal Colours, the reserve top Gundog for 2004. In second was another famous kennel with Frances and Bob Jackson's English Springer Sh Ch Mompesson Royal Destiny and yet another top kennel was third with Patsy and Stephen Hollings' Weimaraner Sh Ch Gunalt Intuition. To complete the quartet was the Italian Spinone Sh Ch Riccini Caprice. For this Group you may have noticed that all these dogs have Sh Ch before their names. In the UK, a Gundog cannot become full Champion without having obtained a field certificate. Without it, their official title is Show Champion.

Working and Pastoral breeds were on the final day. Each year, the Groups rotate one day so that in 2006 Working and Pastoral will be on Thursday, Terrier and Hounds on Friday etc. This was the first Crufts appearance for the Russian Black Terrier, a breed created in the 1950s for Soviet military purposes. The breed is an amalgamation of Rottweiler, Giant Schnauzer, Airedale and, believe it or not, Standard Poodle. British fanciers debated about the order of adjectives, finally deciding that since the place name came first in the Kerry Blue Terrier and the Irish Red and White Setter, it was only proper to call the dog the Russian Black Terrier. Of course, not all breeds eligible to be shown are able to win Challenge Certificates, or tickets as we like to call them, a privilege that comes later on when a breed is well established. For example, the judge awards a Best Dog, Best Bitch and Best of Breed in Malamutes but there are no tickets on offer and therefore no UK champions. That will change in 2006 when Crufts has the first CCs for the breed.

The Working Group took centre stage at 5.45pm with Brenda Banbury judging. She wasted no time in deciding that the award would go to last year's Group winner, the Giant Schnauzer Ch Jafrak Philippe Olivier. Second went to the Doberman Ch Talacre Vysans Boy At Supeta, third to the Landseer Newfie Am Ch Threepond Council Cup Bogart, fourth to the Dutch Bouvier GIJS Santos from The Dogsfarm - yes, honestly, that's his name!

The Pastoral (Herding) Group is much larger than Working and here we had a change of judge as the appointed judge, Margaret Everton, was not well enough and her place was taken by Finnish all rounder Kari Jarvinen, who gave Best to a bit of a dark horse in the Tervueren Ch Domburg Reve D'Amour at nearly 10 years old! Second went to Christina Baileys' top winning Old English Ch/Int/Ned Ch Zottells You Don't Fool Me, another I have previously given a BIS too. Third was another previous BIG winner in the Rough Collie bitch Ch Ingledene Late Night Love and fourth the Bearded Manander Chocolate Truffle.

As has been the norm in previous years, prior to BIS there was a display by Mary Ray for her heelwork to music. This year she surpassed herself with a display with four dogs, quite amazing!

And so to trumpet fanfare and swirling spotlights spelling out Crufts on the green carpet, the Best in Show judge, Jean Lanning, took centre stage. She has bred and shown a variety of breeds, but is best known for her Clausentum Great Danes. Jean, as always, very efficient and wasting no time, gave everyone a thorough look and then it was over to the Norfolk and Peter Green as BIS Crufts 2005 and in Reserve it was the English Setter and Penny Williams.

Really a show not to be missed but if you are coming my best advice to you would be to bring good shoes because by jolly you will need them!

GEOFF CORISH www.Pamplona-Poodles.com



Australian fans supporting Australian Junior Handler Kimberley Ward (left) and below, the Junior Handler finalists



Breeders' Groups



(above) Golden Retriever demonstration and (right) the Foxhound supporters' team



Photos (top) Garry Dryburgh (remainder) Paula Heikkinen-Lehkonen