

DOGS IN REVIEW

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NOVEMBER 2011

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

SPECIAL FEATURE
INTERNATIONAL ISSUE



DOG OF THE MONTH:
THE KERRY BLUE TERRIER

ENG. AM. GCH. PERRISBLU
KENNISLAIN'S CHELSEY

SEE PAGE 31

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FEATURES

- 32 The Nominees for the 2011 Winkies® for Annual Achievement
- 64 The Top Contenders for the 2011 Show Dogs of the Year Awards
- 72 Mt. Rainier Working Dog Club: Making a Splash for Take the Lead
by Dan Nechemias
- 78 The *Dogs in Review* Questionnaire
- 94 The 7 Secrets of Show Success: Part 7 — Be Lucky
by Michael and Cathy Dugan
- 124 Montgomery County 2011: It's All *Good* by Dan Sayers
- 134 Australia: "I Lost My Heart ... in Woolloomooloo?" by Bo Bengtson
- 138 An American in Australia by Debbie Cozart
- 144 ...And an Australian in America by Jamie Hubbard
- 148 Talking to Australian Judges ... compiled by Bo Bengtson
- 162 ...And the Australian Breeders compiled by Bo Bengtson
- 170 How to Become a Judge in Australia: The Judges Training and Education Program
by Darren Bowey
- 171 Quiz: How Well Do You Know Australia? by Nikki Riggsbee
- 172 Australia: Top Dogs

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

- 6 Editor's Page by Allan Reznik
- 10 Bo Bengtson At Large: Are We REALLY Headed for Extinction?
- 14 The British Connection: Illegal Substances, 9,266 Dogs in Birmingham, Medieval Richmond, US Finale at Darlington
by Simon Parsons
- 34 Success in Show Dogs: Thoughts on the Realignment Proposal and the Smith Judges Approval Process
by Richard G. ("Rick") Beauchamp
- 88 O Canada: From the East and From the West
by Will Alexander
by Dawne Deeley
- 96 World in Review: China, Australia
- 110 Show Scene: Mid September-Early October 2011
- 122 DogsInReview.com
- 174 Rates and Deadlines



78



96

JZ'S IMAGE2011



124

THE 7 SECRETS OF Show Success

BY MICHAEL
AND CATHY DUGAN

PART 7 — BE LUCKY

What's luck got to do with it? We've now talked about the many moving pieces needed to make the complex process of showing a competition dog at a high level even possible. Still, after all of the long-term hard work of finding the right dog and handler, organizing the program and advertising, developing backers and committing most of your own time, you still might not win. Why? Ultimately, it still comes down to "luck."

When we heard an old pro talk about how the stars, the moon and the planets all needed to be in alignment to win a Best in Show, we thought it was just another urban myth — we were wrong. After 20 Best in Show wins we were surprised every time without fail. Some weekend lineups looked so good we were sure we couldn't miss; then we couldn't get out of breed. At some shows where we almost withdrew our entry to reduce the pain and bleeding we knew was coming, we won the whole damn thing! Go figure.

We're of Irish descent and a little superstitious about some things. When Ladybug was born on St. Patrick's Day we raised an eyebrow at our good fortune and quickly gave our "Irish Litter" such names as "Luck Be A Lady," "Lucky Charm" and "Luck of the Irish," figuring we would at least have fun. In fact the whole litter was a powerhouse, led by the indomitable Ladybug.

Several lucky events coincided with our campaign for Ladybug. The breed became better known by virtue of the Obama family's addition of a Portuguese Water Dog, "Bo," in 2009. Ladybug was featured on the Madison Square Garden marquee throughout the weekend promoting the 2010 event. And last but not least, several high-profile all-rounders and breed specialists put her up early on to help establish her as a credible contender.

We've all heard the old sayings about luck such as "I'd rather be lucky than

smart" and there's a lot of truth to all of them. The best we ever heard describes how luck really works in the real world: "Luck is the intersection of endless preparation with that moment where life demands your very best." Luck begins when you know in your gut and heart that you are prepared and ready. Ever have one of those moments at work or at play where everything around you seemed clearer and a little voice in your head said "I can do this"?

About the power of preparation: Mario Andretti is regarded as one of the best all-around race car drivers in history; winning everything from the Indianapolis 500 to Formula One championships. In person, Mario is unimposing but carries a persona that suggests he could do anything he set his mind to do. He took me (Mike) around the 500 track for a couple of laps as a favor and scared the crap out of me. We never got over 150 mph, but on the turns the car would be mere inches from an unforgiving concrete wall, focusing my attention like nothing else.

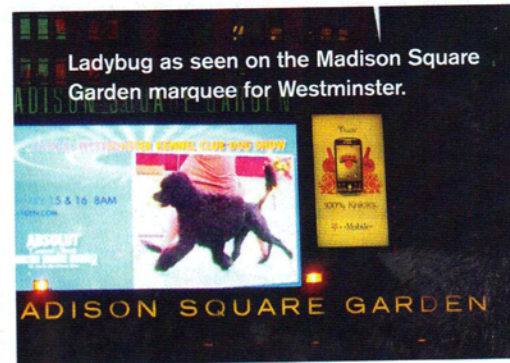
I asked Mario what separated the great drivers from the very good ones; much less mere mortals like me. He told me that the great drivers saw everything in slow motion. He might be hurtling down the track at 230 mph, inches from the wall, debris and other cars swirling around him, but to him he was coasting along at 50 mph.

No big deal. Because he practiced so much, planned every move and visualized every turn and pit stop, by the time race day came, he had already finished the race. Mario also laughed about how in some races all of the great planning blew up on the first lap and he knew it was going to be a very long day. Some days you are lucky and some days you're not.

If you have decided to compete at a high level in anything, including the world of dogs, you've made a personal decision to succeed; the only question left is how you

are going to actually do that. You have decided to live and work with magnificent creatures that will do anything you want (up to a point — dogs have standards too). For us it really is about honoring the dog and embracing the trust placed in us to care for them all of their lives.

As part of our learning process we observed and listened to all the many veteran breeders who would put up with us. We found that the breeders/owners who have had success year after year are a fairly rare bunch. Faced with the same variations, health issues, down-line breeding surprises and sheer craziness of the business, they have managed to operate above the fray, plow ahead stubbornly once they've made their breeding and competition decisions and accept the wins and losses with equal aplomb. From the outside, they just look "lucky."



HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF LUCKY

Many people assume that luck is what happens to other people; their success must be the result of luck. Others just aren't very lucky; they have a great dog but can't seem to catch a break! There must be something going on here.

In fact, most people who are regarded as lucky in the dog ring aren't lucky at all. They have common traits that made them suc-

cessful. What are those secret traits?

❖ Set your goals ... assess your dog, prepare for the ring by observing your competition. For most breeders and owners getting an AKC title is enough.

❖ Timing is everything. Consider if there is a big winner in your area. It may not make sense to initiate a campaign if you have to go up against this dog every weekend.

❖ As we've talked about in our columns, some owners decide to go for broke, closely following where fools rush in. That decision, in itself, will define and drive what follows.

❖ Successful dog owners, like other driven people, take the time to consider dogs, handlers, the way competition works, how much it will cost and what their tolerance for risk will be. Make-or-break questions pop up pretty fast. "Am I willing to spend \$50,000 this year on advertising and not take a big vacation or add to my retirement?" If the answer begins with the thought that "Hell yes, I enjoy this and watching my dogs do well," the rest is easy. Logic? Actually, there is a certain clarity of logic that occurs when you decide to "follow your joy" as the philosopher Joseph Campbell often used to challenge his students.

❖ It all starts with a plan and a personal vision. Asked why he endured years of toil and sacrifice to climb Mt. Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary answered with characteristic brevity, "Because it's there!" Now that's a deceptively simple plan!

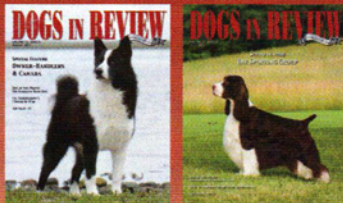
❖ NBA legend Larry Bird was asked why he had dedicated his entire life to something as mundane as the game of basketball. His answer: "It's the only thing I know how to do." Maybe, maybe not; what is true is that it was the one thing he wanted to do!

Being lucky and succeeding with your dogs is a personal decision that only you and your family can make. Like anything else, half-baked commitments will produce half-baked results. Besides, it is, after all, about the dogs.

The end of summer has come once again, and Cathy and I scour the upcoming dog show schedules for the nuggets and gems where our newest batch of youngsters can shine. We've been doing this for nearly 25 years and we never tire of the newest challenge: waiting for the latest hot contenders to appear, weighing in on who will be the next "legend."

While dogs, shows, judges, handlers, owners and the whims of the fancy come and go with chaos and irony, the cycle of the dogs and the competition we have invented for them is immutable. Dogs have influenced our lives for thousands of years and we have occasionally evolved as much as they have. They love us unconditionally, tolerate our foibles and mistakes, and yet, make us feel better than we did 10 minutes ago. Perhaps that's the greatest luck of all. **DR**

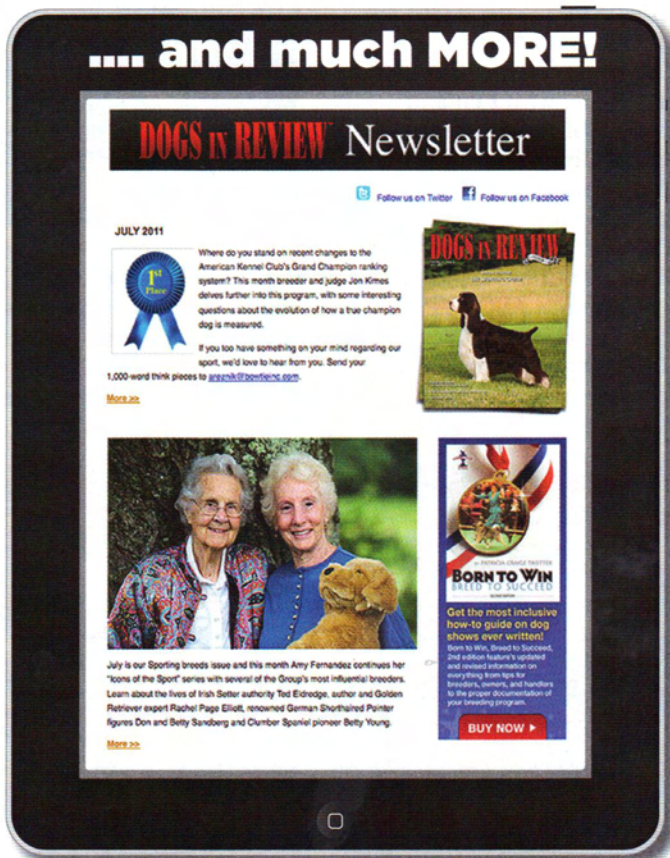
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