



"WHY NO MIXED-BREEDS?" AND OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT DOG SHOWS

From the National Dog Show on Thanksgiving Day to the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship to the Westminster Dog Show in February, I'm sure many of you have watched a dog show on TV. As fun as it is, there are usually aspects of the sport that mystify casual viewers. Here are some FAQs we get every year from armchair civilians.

Who are these people?

Most handlers you'll see in the TV portion of the show are **professionals**. They've spent the year showing a "string" of dogs on behalf of the dogs' owners. Among a pro handler's responsibilities are the grooming, conditioning, transportation, and diet of their charges, often with the help of assistants. But some handlers you'll see on TV are the dog's **owner and breeder**. They're technically "amateurs," but there's nothing amateurish about their expertise. The judges come from the ranks of breeders, amateur breeder-handlers, pro handlers, and dog-club members. Many have played all these roles. Judges are AKC approved, licensed, and selected for assignments by the show-giving club.

How did they get here?

Much has already been decided by the time you settle in with your popcorn and beverage of choice. During the day, dogs compete for awards within their respective breeds. The coveted Best of Breed award entitles a dog to move on to the "group showing" you see on TV. Here, an overall winner in each of the AKC's seven breed groups is determined. By the time your feet hit the ottoman, a **vast entry has been winnowed down to just one dog of each breed**.

How can the judge compare that huge Mastif to that teensie Yorkie?

That's an easy one. The judge doesn't compare dogs of different breeds to each other. The judge compares each dog to the "**breed standard**" of its particular breed. The standard is a **written description** of the physical and mental traits essential for an ideal specimen of a breed. It originates with an **AKC "parent club,"** the national organization devoted to the breed, and is approved by the AKC. **The standard is both the breeder's "blueprint"** and the instrument by which a judge evaluates a breeder's work.

Why no mixed breeds?

Showing dogs is the rare sport that serves a higher purpose: the maintenance and improvement of the breeds. Beneath the glamour, competition, and showmanship, a dog show is essentially an **exhibition of breeding stock**. It's a place where breeders gather to exhibit their stock and have it judged by an expert. As such, it would be pointless to hold conformation dog shows featuring mixed-breeds, purebreds without pedigrees, and purebreds incapable of reproducing.