

Going to the dogs . . .

Pooches capivate breeders

By Joan Boram
special writer

It's a scene worthy of Norman Rockwell — a boy and his dog, a fishing pole slung over his shoulder, trudging along a country lane to the old fishing hole.

But what's this? The lad is togged out in designer sweats, his sturdy feet shod in aerobic "ten-nies" and his faithful mutt is an Akita.

An Akita?
Sounds like a small Japanese car, but it's really a large Japanese dog that's about the same size as a small Japanese car when fully grown (males can weigh as much as 140 pounds).

Revered as a national monument in his native country, the Akita is just one of several exotic imports that are capturing the imaginations of American dog lovers, who are switching their allegiance from such all-American breeds as the blue-tick hound.

Originally bred as a fearless hunter of bear, deer and wild boar, ownership of the Akita was for a time, restricted to the Imperial family and the ruling aristocracy. Care and feeding of the Akita were detailed in elaborate ceremony and a special vocabulary was used to address the Akita and to speak about them.

In modern Japan, the Akita is regarded as a symbol of good health as well as pets and protectors. When a child is born, the family will often receive a small statue of an Akita to express wishes for health, happiness and a long life. A person suffering from illness may receive a similar statue to express wishes for a speedy recovery.

HELEN KELLER is credited with bringing the first Akita to the United States. She was given a two-month-old puppy on a visit to Japan in June 1937. Later, when the puppy died, the Prefecture of Japan sent her another one.

Despite looks, loyalty and intelligence, the breed is not for everyone.

"If you have the kind of house where the doors are open to everyone and there are a lot of strangers, the Akita is not the dog for you," said Eileen Downey of Berkley, an Akita breeder. "They will watch to see if a person is accepted by the family, but they will remain aloof from someone they don't know well."

"They are quite a watch dog. They don't run up and down the fence, barking, but they are very



JERRY ZOLENSKY/staff photographer

Don't let Andrew's sad face fool you. He's a loyal and loving Akita who belongs to Eileen Downey of Berkley.

protective of their family."

Despite a name that sounds like a gourmet ice cream franchise, the Bichon Frise is a very old European breed — they originated in the 1200s in the Canary Islands. A cross between the water spaniel and Maltese, the breed has only been recognized by the American Kennel Club since 1972.

At low points in their histories, Bichon Frise were featured members of circuses and fairs, where their pert looks and intelligence condemned them to a life of buffoonery.

The modern Bichon emerged in France under Francis I, the 16th century patron of the Renaissance. The breed was also very successful in Spain as a favorite of the Infantas. As such, they were included in several of Goya's paintings.

A TINY — 8 1/2 inches — white ball of fluff, the Bichon is not a

worker or a fighter. He's a lover and always has been. Breeder Joanne Horne of Troy is rhapsodic about them.

"They have a gorgeous temperament, very lovable, but laid-back, not excitable like some dogs," she said. "They're very intelligent and easy to train. They just love to be loved."

But they're not trouble free. They need to be brushed daily and groomed regularly, Horne said.

"But for the love they give, they're worth it," she added. The Basenji, the barkless dog, is often favored by philosophical types whose favorite sound is one hand clapping. The breed was favored by Egyptian pharaohs, who received them as gifts from Sudanese pygmies.

It's called the dog of Ceops by archeologists after the pharaoh who built the great pyramids where the dog is depicted in friezes laying near the couch of its master.

According to Commerce Township breeder Les Butler, the dog "came out of the bush (the Congo) in the 1930s, when it was introduced into England and the United States at about the same time."

"Basenjis are very clean and wash themselves by licking their paws like a cat," Butler said. "Also like a cat, they don't care for water. They are very intelligent and good-tempered, but independent — they have a mind of their own."

"They are so graceful that they are often compared to a small deer."

Although he doesn't bark, the Basenji does whine and growl and when he's happy, he chortles," Butler said.



JIM JAGDELD/staff photographer

Almost eaten to extinction, the Chinese Shar-Pei is making a comeback, according to Sue Pustay (right) of Westland, holding Chubs. Showing off the rest of her collection of wrinkled pups are her daughters Vanessa (from left) with Wrinkles and April with Lightweight.

Please turn to Page 4

Warp Factor

Karlos Barney



"Close call, Biff — if those piranha were any younger you'd have been a goner!"

Cobo gets ready for pooch parade

By Joan Boram
special writer

America's largest one-day, all-breed, bench dog show is coming to Detroit's expanded Cobo Hall Sunday, March 12.

The 71st annual Detroit Kennel Club event features a "bench format," meaning that dogs entered in the competition are stationed on benches except during the time they are getting judged and groomed.

The situation is ideal for viewing by spectators as they walk through the show's 400,000 square feet of space — that's 100,000 square feet more than last year and good news for those whose claustrophobia overwhelms their canophilia!

Approximately 3,100 dogs will compete in this year's show. Dogs of each breed will be judged in six different classifications — puppies, novice, American breed, bred by exhibitor, open class and best of breed.

The show will feature a Grand Prix

style steeplechase event with a course that includes seven barriers, a scaling wall and a 10-foot long tunnel.

Dogs will race against the clock during the individual time trials and because of the intricacy of the scissors-shaped Grand Prix course, dogs of all sizes have an equal opportunity to win.

"WITH THE completion of the magnificent Cobo Center, we are looking forward to hosting our best and biggest Detroit dog show," said Eric Bergshagen, president of DKC. Bergshagen is owner of Jagerboro (hunter's home in Danish) Kennels in Troy, one of the oldest registered kennels in Michigan. He breeds Labrador retrievers.

Among the judges will be Paolo Donna of Milan, Italy, who will judge the tournament of champions and individual breeds — Schipperkes, Laas Apso, Keeshonden, French bulldogs and Finnish Spitz.

Please turn to Page 4



Jim Ricker/staff photographer

Joanne Horne of Troy is sold on the Bichon Frise. Joined by her daughter Rebecca, 9, and Andrew, 5, she shows off Molly, 3 months old, and Rembrandt, 2 years old, whom she co-owns, and Tigre, 11 years old.