

TOP BREEDS OF THE YEAR

BY JIM HUGHES

Once again, the Labrador Retriever has been named the 'most popular dog for the year'. Why?? Well, it is beautiful! It is also a good hunting dog. It has been named the number one dog for 18 straight years, so it is becoming a habit. It is becoming one of the favorite breeds to be used for the seeing-eye dog to lead the blind. It is used in search and rescue and in law enforcement as a narcotics sniffer in airport and bus terminals. So, why not?? The Lab breeder says it is the perfect family dog.

Way down in second place, we find the Yorkshire Terrier, followed by the German Shepherd in third place. The Golden Retriever has slipped into fourth place with the Beagle at number five. Rounding out the remaining top ten is the Boxer at number six, the Dachshund at number seven, the Bulldog gaining the number eight slot in spite of the fact that this is probably the most difficult breed to raise and certainly is not the breed for the beginning breeder. Number nine is the always popular Poodle and closing out the top ten breeds is the Shih Tzu.

Over the years, we see breeds rise and fall in popularity. Why, I do not know. As a puppy broker for forty years and now a magazine editor, I have to wonder what happened to the breeds I used to be flooded in? Just because a breed is in the top ten does not mean that a broker is delighted when you list that breed for sale to him. When we have twenty unsold Bulldogs, we would probably rather have some Shelties or Papillion's to offer.

This brings to mind the breeds that used to be offered by the hundreds and that we were sometimes forced to turn down from non-regular breeders. Where, oh, where has that little dog gone? Dobermans come to mind at once, followed by Chow-Chows. Cocker Spaniels were always in heavy supply, as were Keeshonds and Norwegian Elkhounds. We always got way to many Basenjis, but only in February. Lhasa Apso's were also very plentiful in those days, but we were always short on Yorkies and Min Pins.

Over the history of the AKC top ten breed list, the top dog has changed many times.

1880—The English Setter ranked Number One. It was Teddy Roosevelt's favorite dog. It set birds for the bird hunters.

1890---The Saint Bernard reigned supreme. It was and still is used to find stranded hikers lost and stranded in the wilds of nature. When the movie "Beethoven" was made, it made a temporary comeback in popularity.

1900---Collies were extremely popular. They remained in the top ten breeds for 70 years. Who will ever forget Lassie?

1910-1930---The Boston Terrier was developed in Boston by crossing the English Bull with a white English Terrier.

1920---Rin Tin Tin brought the German Shepherd to the number one spot in 1922. This breed has remained one of the top 4 since 1950.

1940-1980---The Cocker Spaniel was the premier breed, helped along by the movie "Lady and the Tramp" and the books "Dick and Jane". Richard Nixon had one named 'Checkers'.

1950---Beagles came into their own. Every farm boy had a rabbit dog but finally the city kids wanted one too. They ranked Number One from 1953 to 1959. Charlie Brown and Snoopy made Peanuts a favorite comic strip. It was Lyndon B. Johnson's favorite breed.

1960-1970---Poodles set the record for remaining at the top. They held the number one position from 1960 to 1982.

1990-2000 and still there. Labrador Retrievers solidly hold on to number one. Bill Clinton had a chocolate one named 'Buddy'. The movie, "Marley and Me" is a must to see.

Usually the top ten breeds are very popular in the pet trade, but not necessarily in the top demand at the time you offer them for sale. Being in the Top Ten means oftentimes there are huge surpluses of that breed. Many times the pet trade would rather see a less popular breed being offered, but keep in mind, that breed must be sought after as a pet. I was a pet store owner on two different occasions. I wanted some rare breeds in my store, but I only wanted one Komondor per year and I could take three or four Cavalier King Charles Spaniels per month. Supply and demand will always rule.