

## High-End Mutts Sit Up and Beg For a Little Respect

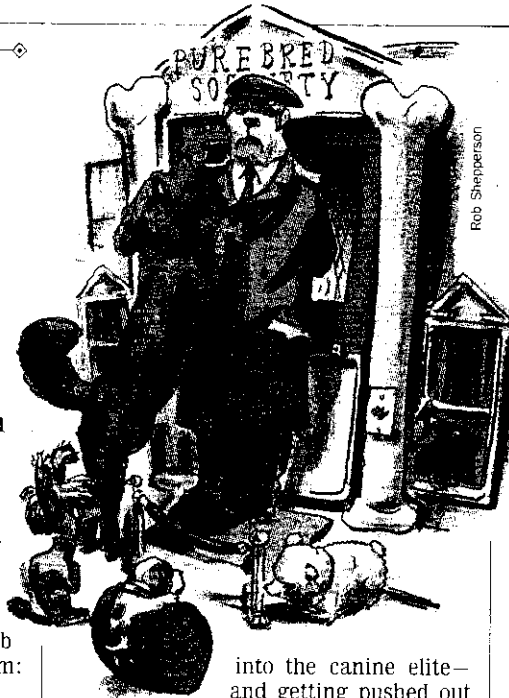
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Labradoodles and Morkies  
Fetch Purebred Prices;  
Kennel Club Shoos Them

By ELLEN GAMERMAN

With her silky coat and full repertoire of tricks, Roxie could be a contender for one of the canine world's top prizes, the coveted Best in Show ribbon at the Westminster Kennel Club competition. There's just one problem: her ancestors.

Roxie's not a purebred, she's a mutt. She is part of a growing segment of hybrids, in this case, a popular cross between a Labrador and a poodle known as a Labradoodle. Her owner, Krista Waitz of Orlando, Fla., is pushing for dogs like Roxie to compete with purebreds despite their mixed lineage. "We're in for the long haul," she says. "We're not giving up."

It's one of the biggest controversies in the canine world. Now that pricey "designer" dogs with names like the Giant Schnoodle (Giant Schnauzer/poodle) or the Morkie (Maltese/Yorkshire terrier) are trotting into homes around the country, their owners are demanding entree



into the canine elite—and getting pushed out like junkyard dogs at a society ball.

Most of the country's 73 million pet dogs are still purebreds or mutts from the local pound. But breeders say designer dog sales are booming. Wallace Havens, whose Puppy Haven Kennel outside Madison, Wis., sells 2,500 puppies a year, says requests for \$600 designer dogs grew by 10% over the last year while demand for Puggles (a cross between a Pug and a Beagle) has tripled. The American Canine Hybrid Club, the designer dog world's answer to the American Kennel Club, says it's registering 500 new litters a month, more than double the number in 2004.

These new mixes don't come cheap. Prices can range from \$300 to \$3,000, with the hottest varieties often fetching more than purebred puppies. A Morkie on divapup.com just sold for \$5,000, at least twice as much as either of its purebred parents. Doodleman Pinscher breeder Jon Blouin of Silverhill, Ala., says the Doberman-poodle mixes now have a one-year waiting list.

Breeders say many designer dogs don't cause allergies because they're bred with a nonshedding parent, often a poodle. They say mixing breeds also helps avoid canine health problems associated with purebreds.

There is also the hipness factor. Actors Jake Gyllenhaal and Uma Thurman have been photographed with each of their Puggles. Jessica Simpson carries her Maltipoo (a cross between a Maltese and a poodle) in a Louis Vuitton dog carrier.

Nationally, purebreds still rule: The number of purebred dogs kept as pets grew by four million over the last five years to about 42.5 million, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association. The number of mutts grew one million to about 31 million. No one currently tracks the growth in designer dog sales but the pet products manufacturers group says it plans to start next year.

Now, breeders of the fancy hybrids are getting organized, enlisting genetics experts to testify that their crosses are becoming true breeds of their own and lobbying the American Kennel Club with letters and emails pushing to get official status. Some are enforcing stricter rules about reproduction. The Cockapoo Club of

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# High-End Mutts Fetch Purebred Prices, Beg for Some Respect

*Continued From First Page*

America has launched its first ever registry, asking owners to make the Cocker Spaniel/poodle mixes official by keeping "detailed breeding records that will be able to stand the scrutiny required."

The stakes are high: Americans spend at least \$14 billion a year on dogs, while purebred dog lovers spend \$330 million at American Kennel Club dog shows each year. In recent years, competitions like these have become more popular among a wider audience, too, with nine shows being televised next year—up from just one annual event, Westminster, five years ago.

The designer dogs aren't allowed to compete in the elite shows. The American Kennel Club, whose registry is considered "the Bible" for purebreds, says only their dogs have consistent offspring, while mixes can vary greatly in size, color and behavior depending on their parents.

## 'Getting Scammed'

"When you pay \$1,000 for a purebred dog, you're paying for decades or centuries of consistent breeding," says AKC spokeswoman Daisy Okas. With the designer dogs, she says: "Consumers are getting scammed."

Purebred owners dabbling in pricey designer breeds say they have to keep their sideline a secret for fear of getting caught. Groups like the Poodle Club of America will expel members found to be cross breeding. Miileen Coulter, owner of Fancypoo4u.com, which sells purebred poodles, started breeding Yorkipoos (Yorkshire terrier/ poodle) and Maltipoos after realizing the dogs could bring her at least as much as a purebred. She doesn't advertise this on her Web site, but people call anyway, drawn, she says, by word of mouth.

The designer mixes even have an invitation to a dog show. Next month, Dog Show USA, the first online dog show, will allow the designer mixes to compete alongside purebreds for "best trick," "owner look-alike" and even best in show.

New breeds aren't born overnight. Most have come from hundreds of years of careful mating to foster certain traits, like a Dachshund's short legs. The AKC requires at least three generations of

## Designer Dogs



Norvia Behling

### Maltipoo

\$350-\$1,700

Meltese and a poodle



Elizabeth Mandarino

### Chinese Crestese

\$1,250-\$1,750

The Chinese Crested mixed with Maltese



Chelle Calbert

### Puggle

\$450-\$1,500

beagle-pug mix



Chelle Calbert

### Chiweenie

\$150-\$450

Chihuahua and a Dachshund



Chelle Calbert

### Chug

\$350-\$600

Chihuahua-Pug mix



Angela Denny

### Giant Schnoodle

\$600-\$1,500

Giant version of the schnauzer-poodle mix

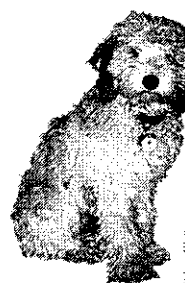


Chelle Calbert

### Cockaller

\$350-\$800

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel-Cocker Spaniel



Krista Weir

### Labradoodle

\$500-\$3,500

Labrador-poodle mix

dogs with highly consistent offspring from hundreds of litters to certify a new breed. A nod from the AKC means dog-show invitations and clout in the breeding business.

The International Labradoodle Association has been lobbying the AKC for recognition over the last year, says Ms. Waitz, owner of Roxie and an ILA board member. Citing consistent Labradoodle-to-Labradoodle breeding for six generations, the group is trying to prove breed purity through genetic testing. The AKC says there are no plans to register Labradoodles.

## Tensions Mount

Meanwhile, tensions are rising on the human end of the leash. Ms. Waitz, who breeds Labradoodles, says she sometimes gets snubbed by purebred owners. "The poodle people are the snottiest," she says.

Indeed, the Poodle Club of America is shooting its first-ever antidesigner-dog video. Club President Doris Cozart says the tape, which will play at the poodle exhibit booth at a national dog show in Tampa next month, will feature champion purebred poodles romping on a Flor-

ida beach. The tag line: "Why would you have a mixed breed when you can have the original breed?"

Some veterinarians worry that the rush to breed new types of dogs could cause problems for the dogs. For example, they say it is important to ensure that in breeding two dogs the larger is the female so the puppies aren't too big for the mother's frame. Veterinarians also say some claims, including that some mixes don't cause allergies, are unreliable. Hybrid breeders say they follow the same standards as the purebred world and add that with careful breeding they can deliver on their promises.

These days, Mr. Havens is promoting a pooch he calls the "mini-Saint Bernard"—a toy version of a Saint Bernard, with a mug that looks like it belongs over a tiny brandy barrel. (Mr. Havens, while keeping the dog's parent lines a mystery, says the dog actually has zero Saint Bernard DNA.) Purebred critics call the dog an affront to the noble rescue dogs, praising the real-life breed in all its big and slobbery glory. But Mr. Havens counters by promoting one more feature in his designer pooch: "It's got a dry mouth," he says. "No drool."