

Cheers to You

The vast majority of Beardie breeders involved in the dog sport are responsible breeders. They strive to build a solid breeding program by learning which dogs should be bred, they have health screenings done prior to breeding, they properly socialize puppies, and they interview prospective buyers and maintain mentorlike relationships with many of their puppies' new owners. A lot of time, money, and effort go into being a responsible breeder, but the rewards are immeasurable.

Likewise, the vast majority of Beardie owners involved in the sport are responsible dog owners. They continue to socialize puppies, regularly train their dogs, give them proper exercise, perform regular grooming, supply good nutrition, and provide proper veterinary care throughout the dog's life. They generally compete at some level with the dogs they keep, and sometimes they breed them. All of these efforts are expensive and time consuming, but the canine-human bond that results is well worth it.

There are, however, breeders and owners among us who take this responsibility to a higher level. For these, it isn't enough to train and groom the dog and even compete in one sport; no, these owners compete in several sports and end up with a long list of titles added to their dog's registered name.

Some may say that these breeders and owners participate in this fashion because of selfish pride and to raise their stature in the dog world and in their own minds. I interpret this hyper-involvement as something less shallow than that, however, and not rooted in human frailty but rather in a deeper understanding that their Beardies (as many other breeds) are so smart that it would be a shame to let their intelligence go to waste.

These people see it is their responsibility to make sure their dogs are stimulated mentally and physically by competing in a variety of sports. Exercise, nutrition, and so on are all necessary for good health, but the ultra-responsible owner understands that working the brain is just as critical to a Beardie's health. People who are committed and involved for the betterment of the breed through their individual dogs strive to develop a herding dog

whose mental capacity is challenged in a variety of ways, including encouragement to use its natural instincts.

Understandably, not everyone can participate in a variety of activities with our dogs, and those who cannot are loving, responsible breeders and owners too. All of us in the sport have made a commitment to the betterment of the breed. It is important, however, to recognize from time to time those with significant accomplishments in particular areas. So, to those breeders and owners who compete in many sports with their dogs, I applaud you for fully realizing your dog's potential and for dedicating the time, money, and effort to see it flourish.

The sport of dogs has allowed these exceptional people to continually strengthen the canine-human bond through a variety of activities. Just as importantly, it has given them peace in knowing that on that last day, they gave their dogs the best they could by making sure each had a full, fun, and adventurous life. —Gail Miller Bisher, New York, N.Y.; gailmillerbisher@me.com