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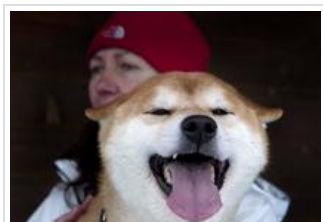
February 10, 2014 in City

## Dogged beauty: Local shiba inu competes at Westminster Kennel show

Erica Curless The Spokesman-Review

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**Mr. Jones, a shiba inu, relaxes with his breeder, owner and trainer, Sandi Smith, on Friday at their home in Valley, Wash. Mr. Jones is competing today against 12 other shiba inus for best of breed at the Westminster Dog Show in New York City.**  
[\(Full-size photo\)](#)

### Coming up

**What:** 138th annual Westminster Dog Show

**When:** Today and Tuesday

**On TV:** Today, 5-8 p.m., CNBC; Tuesday,

5-8 p.m., USA

VALLEY, Wash. – Mr. Jones leaps through the snow like a jackrabbit, hopping through drifts in a race for the orange ball. He crashes into his playmate and rolls down the hill before popping up with a trademark smile, perfectly highlighted by his black lips.

From a distance, onlookers might assume the antics in the hilly fields at the entrance to the Colville Valley are red foxes playing on a bitter winter day.

Mr. Jones is no fox. The 25-pound male is a world-renowned show dog, a near-perfect specimen of the shiba inu breed, a Japanese hunting dog raised to flush birds and corner wild boar. Today Mr. Jones, registered as GCH Dragon House Mr. Jones, is in New York City at the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. He competes this morning against 12 other shiba inus for the best of breed, a title he won in 2010. In 2012, Mr. Jones won best of merit, a discretionary award judges can give to outstanding entries at Westminster.

“He’s an ambassador for the breed,” said owner Sandi Smith, who has traveled the world with Mr. Jones, a furry ball of energy that still isn’t obnoxious.

Viewers can watch a live video of Mr. Jones long trotting around the ring today at 6:45 a.m. Pacific time at [westminsterkennelclub.org](http://westminsterkennelclub.org), Smith said. According to the Westminster website, 73 dogs from Washington are competing, along with six from Idaho, 13 from Oregon and one from Montana.

Smith is also showing Mr. Jones’ kennel mate, Sexy Sadie, who she hopes captures the best of opposite sex title in the shiba inu class.

If Mr. Jones wins best of breed, he will compete this evening for the best in his non-sporting group, which includes 20 breeds such as poodles, bulldogs and the Xoloitzcuintli (Mexican hairless). The winner of the non-sporting group competes Tuesday in the famous best-of-show event at Madison Square Garden. Last year, an affenpinscher named Banana Joe took the title. A

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shiba inu has never won.

Smith, Mr. Jones and Sexy Sadie flew to New York on Saturday. The day before, they played in rural Stevens County with no sign of stardom other than Mr. Jones' exceptionally clean teeth. Later that afternoon, Smith was going to clip and buff his nails with oil. His thick double coat is waterproof and odorless, requiring little grooming. Shiba inus are shown naturally, meaning Mr. Jones gets to keep his scraggly whiskers and spends little time in hairdressing.

His face is confident and smart, with dark almond eyes, big cheeks and triangle ears. He's compact and muscular, evidence of his daily workout sessions on the treadmill, in the pool, chasing the ball or pulling a 25-pound chain up and down the farm's hills to build muscle and extend his trot for the show ring. Smith is in good shape, too, from running the hills with him.

She initially raised akitas but switched to shiba inus 17 years ago after seeing a puppy that resembled a fluffy stuffed animal with flat ears and a big smile. She bought the puppy's brother and her journey began.

Smith, who owns Dragon House Shibas, is a top breeder, with pups selling for \$1,500 but only after prospective owners undergo an extensive interview process and become "family" with the Smiths. Smith is a rarity at Westminster because she breeds, trains, grooms and shows her own dogs. Many Westminster dogs have separate owners and breeders and high-dollar professional handlers.

"She's a real, true purist," said Smith's husband, Nick. He shows German shepherds in Schutzhund trials, which highlight police-work skills such as search-and-rescue and odor detection.

Sandi Smith isn't a "one-hit wonder" because her dogs have consistently performed well, Nick Smith said.

Besides Westminster, Mr. Jones is record-breaking four-time best of breed winner at the American Kennel Club/Eukanuba National Championship. He's taken best of breed twice at the FCI World Dog Show, which is known as the largest dog show on the planet. In 2010, he was reserve best of breed out of more than 100 shiba inus at Crufts Dog Show in England.

The Smiths moved to Valley from Whidbey Island nearly two years ago. Smith only competes in large shows, where the number of points collected is worth the travel and expense.

Smith said purebred breeders are important to keep the breeds true to their disciplines and improve their health. Yet that's not always a popular idea with animal rights activists such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which annually protests Westminster. PETA opposes breeding purebreds while shelters are full of mutts.

In 2009, two PETA members dressed in Ku Klux Klan garb outside the show. A PETA spokesman told the Associated Press that the American Kennel Club is trying to create a "master race" when it comes to purebred dogs.

Smith scooped Mr. Jones into her arms while talking about the importance of finding responsible breeders and not buying from puppy mills or pet stores.

"I always breed healthy and happy dogs with a reliable temperament," she said.

Mr. Jones looked at her and smiled.

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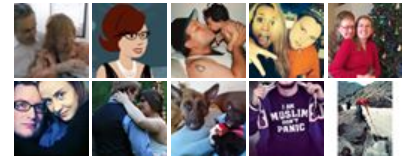
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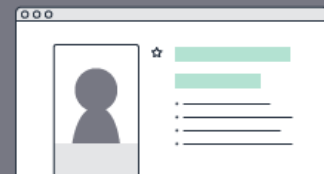
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