

# SOUTH WHIDBEY RECORD



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NEWS

## Langley show dog a big hit on the European canine circuit



Sandi Smith of Langley and her show dog Mr. Jones: "He's very quiet and loves people." — Image Credit: Roy Jacobson / The Record



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Nov 4, 2009 at 10:00AM

Mr. Jones may be just another fur ball around the house. But in Europe, he's 22 pounds of pure celebrity.

"He did a lot of winning when he was over there," said Sandi Smith of Langley, with understatement.

Jones, as Smith calls him, is a champion Shiba Inu, a Japanese breed of dog originally raised for hunting in the mountains. His formal pedigreed name is CH. Dragonhouse Mr. Jones.

He's back home running around the Smith acreage on Welcome Road near Sandy Point after a whirlwind trip to the continent this past month, where the team of Smith and Jones made quite a splash.

First stop was the World Dog Show in Bratislava, Slovakia in eastern Europe, a modest four-day affair with more than 25,000 dogs entered in 350 categories. There were 90 entries in the Shiba class alone.

There were eight pavilions at the exposition complex, Smith said, each of which would hold any of the largest dog shows in the United States.

"I've never experienced that kind of diversity over here," Smith said. "The noise was incredible."

But the cast of thousands didn't phase Jones. He won best of show in his class in the event, then competed against the winners of other breeds in the Nordic class and placed second overall, Smith said.

On his way back to the States the following weekend, Jones stopped off at Germany's largest dog show, in Dortmund, where he won best of breed. The victory earned him points toward what could be an eventual German championship, Smith said.

Smith said Jones is "very quiet and loves people." He's about 2½ feet long, 15½ inches tall and has a personality that might be described as wriggly. He's not shy.

Jones, who's 2½, began his dog-show career last year in St. Louis, Mo., where he won best of breed in his group, impressing six different judges, Smith said.

From there he went to the American Kennel Club's Eukanuba National Championships in southern California, where he was best of breed and best among his group, which earned him a cameo on the cable television show "Animal Planet."

In Jones' future is a return appearance at Eukanuba in January, and perhaps the prestigious Crufts dog show in England, and the Westminster Kennel Club show in New York, the pinnacle of canine spectacles in the U.S.

Smith hopes eventually to maneuver Jones into a show category that doesn't include poodles.

"Poodles are always beating us," she said.

For the time being, Smith and Jones will keep their show on the road.

"As long as he's winning, we'll take advantage of his streak," Smith said, but she doesn't plan to make a career of it.

"I don't see myself going to dog shows every weekend," she said.

It's not that Smith has nothing else to do, with seven adult Shibas and 11 puppies bounding here and there, inside the house and out. She has been raising and breeding Shibas for 17 years, and Japanese Akitas before that.

She said she typically keeps one or two puppies from each litter, "and the rest leave as pets." She's currently grooming one of Jones' 8-month-old daughters for the show ring.

Smith said her family is indulgent of her dog preoccupation. Her husband, Nick, is retired from the Navy, and they have two sons, Kevin, 16, and Jake, 13.

"Jake's the most into the dogs," she said. "Kevin's more into the girls."

A native of Bavaria, Smith came to the U.S. at age 19, and she and her family have lived on South Whidbey for five years, and in Oak Harbor two years before that.

Competition isn't Smith's only dog enterprise. She also takes in rescued dogs. And she runs a "doggy daycare," where customers can drop off their pets for some socialization, or for a little short-term dog-sitting.

She credits her socialization techniques with helping Jones cope with the noise and confusion of the show ring. Socialization is a great tool for working with dogs, she said.

"But I have to be really careful how I match them up," she added.

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Smith also has installed a heated pool in an outbuilding, which she uses to provide aqua-therapy for dogs who are suffering physical debilitation, or are recovering from surgery.

Outside, the grounds are alive with chickens, rabbits, goats, four horses and a turkey named Bora. But inside the family home, the dogs rule.

"I guess I'm pushing my limits," Smith said. "There's no more room on the couch. If you get up, you've lost your spot, because there's a Shiba on it."

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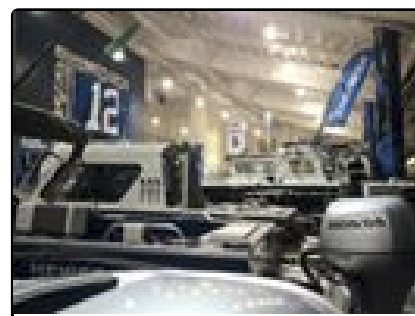
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