

A BREED apart at Westminster

7 new dog types
to debut in style
at iconic show

BY MARIA ALVAREZ
Special to Newsday

Phoebe, a fluffy, frosty-gray miniature poodle, is as fast at age 9 as she was when she was younger, proclaims her loving owner Rena Barnett of Amity Harbor, whose prized companion will compete in the Westminster dog show agility competition next month.

Phoebe, also known as Mach Joey's Baby Girl, rushes through the agility course's weave poles with ease before jumping over a pole and into the center of a tire then leaping into Barnett's waiting arms.

"She's a bouncy black blur," Barnett said of her 5-pound champion. Phoebe is "a little person who doesn't know she is a dog. . . . She is more than a pet. She's my friend."

Phoebe is one of 3,000 pure-bred and mixed American breed dogs to compete in the 140th Westminster Kennel Club dog show, which is Madi-

son Square Garden's oldest client. But only one dog will reign as judges select the best in show — a dog that wins over all categories. Last year, the blue ribbon was awarded to Miss P, a beagle.

This year, seven breeds are being introduced in the iconic show as well as a new obedience competition. The nation's top obedience dogs were invited to fill the 35 entries. golden retrievers dominate the competition with 13 entries.

Dogs will be judged on responsiveness to handlers' commands from jumping, scent discrimination and "drop on recall." The competition demonstrates training and teamwork between dog and handler.

A breed being introduced this year is the miniature American shepherd, a small, long-haired-herding dog that has become a popular breed with young, upstart Manhattan professionals, said breeder Chuck Smith of East Haddam, Con-

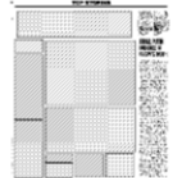
necticut.

"Their disposition is great for apartment and park living. They like to get out and jog in the park. We call them Velcro dogs because they stick right to you. You'll never go to the bathroom alone again. They are just trustworthy and loyal," said Smith, laughing.

Eye catching mop-dog, or dreadlocks pooch — a Bergamasco — attracts the gentle dog owner, said Eric Rothman, 44, of the Hudson Valley.

"It has not changed," Rothman said. "I like the look. Believe it or not he can see," he said of 7-year-old Uragano, which means hurricane in Italian.

The three-day competition begins Feb. 13 with the agility contest at Pier 94 on 54th Street and 12th Avenue. Competitions continue on Feb. 15-16, with the finals Tuesday night, Feb. 16, at Madison Square Garden.





CRAIG RUTTLE

BEGGING FOR A CHANCE: A Berger Picard, above, one of seven breeds new to the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, is introduced at Madison Square Garden. ■ Video, photos: newsday.com/pets



A Spanish water dog, left, and a Bergamasco, above, two of seven breeds added to the competition, are seen yesterday during a kickoff for next month's Westminster Kennel Club dog show.