



The FLYOVER States

by Lisa Dubé Forman

I have been reflecting on a captivating conversation I recently had with a veteran dog fancier. This au courant individual contacted me on one matter, which then blossomed into a lengthy tête-à-tête as we drifted to another favorite topic of nearly all dog people, the American Kennel Club. In particular, our discussion lead me to delve into some meaningful statistics and rankings, but first the subject matter.

How does the American Kennel Club genuinely view the rest of the country beyond Madison Avenue, New York City? Could the famous

Saul Steinberg illustration on the cover of *The New Yorker* March 29, 1976, magazine be a humorous portrayal of the AKC view of our nation's landscape, with its accompanying title, "A Parochial New Yorker's View of the World From 9th Avenue?" The answers may depend on who you ask and what region of the country they live in. This celebrated illustration may very well symbolize the immutable nature of AKC's 'powers that be.' Could it be that this is one of the reasons why the AKC will not relinquish it's leased space for corporate headquarters at 260 Madison Avenue, New York City?

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Regarding the latter, in the face of recent austerity measures -- *mostly due to many years of declining registrations -- how can this non-profit organization justify leasing reportedly 32,000 rentable square feet in 'B+' rated office space in New York City? 'B+' rating is the highest classification for this building due to its age, yet is a testament to the prime location. Newer buildings in prime locations are awarded 'A' ratings. As officially reported, the \$3,008,000 operating expenses for rent does not break out the costs between the Madison Avenue Headquarters from the North Carolina Operations leased space. Although I was unable to confirm exactly how much of the \$3,008,000 is dedicated towards Madison Avenue, I have an educated hypotheses as I am thoroughly versed in what the market rates were and are for this space.

**The 2012 Annual Report declares dog and litter registrations for this year were \$1.7 million (10%) higher than 2011. However, I think that the price increase of \$10.00, from \$20.00 to \$30.00, for dog registration and transfer fees, and a \$10 fee for each additional owner added to the dog during the original registration of the dog and any subsequent transfers, effective January 1, 2012, may have had a favorable influence on the increase in registration revenue.*

Having been born and raised in New Jersey, I am quite familiar and comfortable with New York metropolitan attitudes. We reference the Tri-State area as Long Island, much of lower Connecticut and most of northern New Jersey as the metropolis of New York City. I know many residents who would burst with laughter when shown this funny and clever magazine cover which pokes fun at ourselves. Simply, it was a witty and amusing illustration depicting how self-absorbed New Yorkers see themselves in comparison with the rest of our country and the world for that matter. Yet, how far off base is it really when considering previous and possibly current decisions of the AKC administration?

It is more than plausible that those individuals who collectively have held authority over the administration of the AKC had or continue to hold a parochial view towards the rest of the country. Perhaps the more politically tactful way to describe this would be to say, outside of New York, the majority of the country's participation is comparable to playing supporting, certainly not lead roles in our sport. What's more, it is possible the Midwest along with the South and Western states except for two, California and Florida, are looked upon as 'the flyover states.' Is this metaphor a



valid supposition about their roles in our sport? Not if we look at some statistics, but before that let us probe another former AKC decision which deserves our attention.

On or about 1991 an intriguing and, for all practical purposes, advantageous relocation opportunity was extended to the AKC. Reportedly, the presentation was a well-balanced and sound initiative providing an opportunity for the AKC to relocate its headquarters to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, across from or very near Lexington's world-renowned Kentucky Horse Park. Reportedly, the initiative offered a prime location with a 99-year lease. The latter is something of an old term between estates-for-life and a tenant-at-will which is the longest, most advantageous possible term of lease for real property so that the lessee might

reasonably build or lay out money for the property. Alas, AKC refused the offer. This supposedly was an unparalleled opportunity which would have afforded numerous benefits with the obvious being a central location for AKC Headquarters and Operations near the Kentucky Horse Park, a world-class event destination with priceless visibility and geographic accessibility, especially for delegates meetings. We are left to only speculate, but if the AKC had been avant-garde in their deliberations, assuming any took place, would they today own their own administrative offices, indoor/outdoor showgrounds, and event buildings for hosting the annual AKC Dog Show all ensconced in a convenient, world-class destination. Moreover, imagine the potential equity this non-profit organization could have accumulated to invest in its own future and its' commitment to being the Dog's Champion. I do not pretend to be fully informed as to the argumentation AKC used in their declination, but it is not unreasonable to contemplate that an insular, provincial attitude prevailed ruling out reestablishment in a midwest state, a long way from Madison Avenue.

As I reflected over a few aspects of the foregoing conversation, my curiosity increased and I decided to do some digging. I already suspected that one or more of the largest dog shows were either in California (having already judged at the remarkable Palm Springs Kennel Club which regularly is ranked as one of the top five dog shows) or in Louisville, Kentucky with the Kentuckiana Cluster. I set about looking at ten years of data from the Annual Dog Show Rankings and Event Statistics Reports for the largest all-breed dog shows in the country. Rather than counting how many dog shows were held in each state with

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their total number of annual entries, I used the Top 25 in Rankings of Dog Events to find the shows with the highest number of entries, and repeatedly so over the past decade, instead of a snapshot in time with anomalies. I then regionalized the results. My logic is that if a region has multiple shows appearing in the Top 25 Rankings for entries, then this area has greater participation than those areas without multiple, few or having no shows appearing in the Top 25 Rankings. Note that despite the title 'Top 25,' many years there were ties for placing in the ranks, therefore increasing the tally for a specific year to more than 25. I regionalized the country according to standard demarcations such as the West comprising all states up to and including Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming and Montana. The Midwest comprises the Dakotas to Ohio but I modified this region to include Kentucky because of its centered, geographic location immediately under Ohio. The South encompasses Texas to Florida and Virginia and finally, the East from Pennsylvania to Maine. I did not include anomalies such as the AKC Annual Dog Show while in Florida or California because this misrepresents actual data, since this is a specialty dog show event that moves around. Even if I did include this unique show, it would have only cemented the lead for the Western region. Additionally, the shows held in conjunction with the AKC annual event while hosted in Florida were not included because historically the previous years data showed that these events did not rank in the Top 25, and because of the AKC Annual Dog Show they received a much needed entry boost. However, even if I did include these anomalies, it would have little influence on the data. Notably, I tallied info for years 2001 through and including 2012.

My results show the Midwest accounts for 35.35% percent, the Western region comprises 34.68%, the South has 16.83% and the East trails with 13.13% in the top 25 dog show rankings based on number of entries. I allow for the slightest margin of error as I do not profess to be a statistician.

This data provides a strong case for compelling impartial individuals to reevaluate any old, provincial attitudes towards the 'flyover states' of our country. The shows with the highest number of entries repeatedly are in the interior of the country, Kentucky and Ohio, and in the West -- California and Oregon. The analysis leads me to the next topic regarding AKC's pride and joy, the AKC Annual Dog Show. I have spoken with many exhibitors and dog fanciers who exclaim their desire for this show to circumnavigate the country as a matter of fairness for all interested parties to attend. Their displeasure and complaints are both understandable and valid because many, many exhibitors with large and giant breeds cannot or will not risk flying their dogs. Despite the number of recent entries in the Orlando, Florida location in which the annual show has ranked #1 and #3 for 2012 and 2011 respectively, I believe this perimeter location directly influences the quality of many exhibited breeds. It prevents this celebrated event from fulfilling a significant pur-

pose; to feature excellent representations of our overall breed populations. This cannot be achieved if we continuously see the same local owner-handlers, kennel or breeders competing, especially those with mediocre quality specimens. Essentially in some or more breeds we are observing microhabitats. How does the Annual Dog Show then differentiate from the area's local kennel club shows?

I understand potential revenue and costs are a determining factor in locating large, specialized events. Additionally, I assume that the managing committee considers the weather in siting their annual event together with city infrastructure, hotel capacities and so on. However, the Event Statistics and Dog Show Rankings appear to temper these otherwise reasonable concerns. If one looks at the data, the Midwest region repeatedly has the largest entry draws with the top shows held in mid-March, certainly not the most pleasant weather during the year. Despite the weather, three of the four days of the Kentuckiana cluster all-breed dog shows in Louisville, Kentucky, continuously lead or rank in the top five shows in the country, and have done so for more than a decade of available statistics. The fourth Louisville show ranks consecutively in the Top 15. It is obvious to me that this interior, cardinal location in a 'flyover state' provides accessibility to all our nation's exhibitors and is a positive, beneficial alternative to current perimeter locations.

Consider one last look at the stats, the 2012 AKC Annual Orlando show garnered 3443 entries ranking #1 and the 2012 Evansville Kennel Club, Louisville show ranked #2 with 3066. However, in 2011, the Evansville Kennel Club, Louisville, KY show ranked #1 attracting 3172 entries, the Louisville Kennel Club ranked #2 with 3093 entries and the AKC Annual Orlando show ranked 3rd garnering 3064 entries. We can only ponder appreciable increases in entries the AKC Annual Dog Show might attract if centrally located nationwide, in Louisville or Lexington, Kentucky.

To conclude, with all due respect to the gorgeous gold coast of California and the Magic Center of Florida, I believe hosting the AKC Annual Dog Show at the Kentucky Exposition Center, one of the ten largest facilities of its type in the U.S., with over 1,200,000 square feet of indoor space and the metro area offering accommodations of nearly 17,000 rooms requires little to no mental effort. I am certain of one thing, that it would be a historic gesture of respect to all the dog exhibitors within the interior of our country, all located beyond the Hudson River.

My God, there is life out there after all!

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