

SHOWTIME ... DOGGY-STYLE

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First published in the Bengal Cat Clubs publication 'The Bengal Times'

I am rather miffed at the moment. The appearance of yet another cat related item in the house has prompted me to take an inventory. Although there are only two cats in residence, there are no fewer than eight cat beds on the premises, and despite this, only two are used on a regular basis.

Misti has her own purpose built kitty sofa on top of the kitchen wall cupboards. This gives her both a perfect view of all food preparation, as well as all day coverage through the window of the comings and goings on the bird table. Or the buffet table, as she likes to think of it.

No view for Ziggi though, as his favourite pastime is sleeping. 'What's the point of a view when you've got your eyes closed?' is his philosophy. He favours sleeping in a cupboard that he adopted some months ago. What is it with Bengal cats and their liking for high places?

I on the other hand, have only one bed. You must understand, I am a trained gun dog, adept in every aspect of my profession. I am both respected and revered by my fellow canines for both my retrieval and obedience skills. Imagine my shame and embarrassment if it should ever come to light that I am forced to sleep on a leopard-print bed. A blanket bought from a car boot sale and an old duvet, were expertly transformed into my Christmas present last year. GET A LIFE WOMAN.

Despite several attempts at sabotage, the thing is indestructible. Luckily, Misti has taken pity on my plight and pretends it is hers when my chums come around. The trade off being, that I have to give her ears a wash once a week. Cat wax is definitely an acquired taste!

This brings me to the rosettes. These ribbons cover two entire walls of the utility room. Colourfully displayed alongside Award Certificates and cat photographs, the rosettes are a constant reminder of my back-seat in this household. My chums are most definitely kept clear of this room of sordid secrets.

Actually *I've* got a rosette you know!! Last summer '*she*' took me to one of those quaint country shows you get round these parts of Devon. The programme stated there was to be a family dog show at 2pm. '*She*' looked at me excitedly as she eyed the schedule of classes. I looked at her with my tail wagging furiously. "Aaah Yes Buckles, you're right, I'll enter you in that!"

Off we went to sign up for the show as an image of the 'Top Pedigree', or 'Top Hunting Dog' Trophy sitting on the mantelpiece at home, popped into my mind. Now that would be something to show off to the lads! What would '*she*' enter me in? The suspense was almost too much to bare.

We approached the show entry table at the same time as a rather lovely young spaniel. She fluttered her long eyelashes and I tried to contain my enthusiasm by putting on my most macho and aloof hunting dog image. After all, I was about to be catapulted into the dog show world where bitches were ten a penny.

The bubble burst very quickly as the words "Waggy Tail Competition, please" echoed in my head. Surely '*she*' can't be serious. '*She*' looked at me, patted me and smiled. Open mouthed I turned to the bitch as she walked off grinning with a look of superior disdain spread about her face.

Never one to let things get me down; I decided to put as much gusto into the competition as I could muster under the circumstances. The 'Waggy Tail' contestants were called into the ring and off we went.

The class was well supported with over twenty-five dogs of all breeds, colours, shapes and sizes. They ranged from a couple of scragballs who should never have been seen in public let alone the show circuit, to average mutts who thought the whole thing was a huge joke and were just loving all the attention from the audience, to some very posh pedigrees who obviously thought the proceedings were way beneath their status in life.

The handlers were also a varied bunch. There was a scruffy boy eating a ball of bright pink candy floss that was as big as a football. A crop topped young Lolita busily texting her friends. Small ones, finding it difficult to keep concentration let alone control, and bored ones, obviously encouraged by pushy parents to enter into the spirit of things. The quiet, pretty little girl wearing the floral print Laura Ashley dress and Alice band seemed oblivious to the fact that she was leading a dog wholly unsuited to the task in hand. She stared at the judge, wide eyed and innocent. The fact that mine was the only handler over the age of fourteen didn't seem to embarrass or detract from 'her' determination to win. 'She' really has no shame.

The crowds of people that gathered around the large oval ring showed that I had underestimated the popularity of this class and I could feel the tension as I eyed up the tails I was competing against. My tail swung from side to side as I began to wag in earnest. We all lined up and, as we were at one end of the line-up, we were ushered to begin parading around. Everyone started walking everyone except for us that is. 'She', having watched Crufts Dog Show on the television, suddenly lifted her arm vertically in the air, and, holding the lead erect nearly throttling me; 'she' broke into a brisk trot. I, having also watched Crufts, followed. With my head held proudly in the air and my legs prancing to an imaginary beat, I tried hard to keep up whilst trying to keep my balance at the same time. A difficult feat with your bottom swaying from side to side.

I believe the correct term for what followed is described as, 'The Domino Effect'. Taking the cue from me, the Beadle behind also broke into a trot. It's little boy hanging on to his lead for grim life as he was dragged along behind us. One dog after another started running to catch up with the aroma of the butt in front. The handlers, taken by surprise at this unexpected spurt of movement, were reluctantly jerked into following. A young girl ran erratically in all direction, blinded by the sticky ball of pink candy floss that had attached itself to her face. Another dog ran into the middle of the ring, going round and round in circles before eventually squatting down for a poo as his handler keeled over with dizziness.

The Sheepdog spotted the sheep in a distant ring and decided to leave the arena and go to work. The rescue Greyhound thought he was back on the racetrack again and ran off in the direction of the Moors and hasn't been seen since. Some fell by the wayside as they ran into the crowd who were by now, all rolling around in fits of laughter.

While I could see all the pandemonium going on behind us from the corner of my eye, 'she' was ignorant of the chaos 'she' had created. With a fixed smile upon her face, in her mind, 'she' was indeed at Crufts and we were going to win. This is where all my obedience training came into effect. I kept my cool as a vision of a lucrative dog food commercial was within my grasp.

Eventually the judge, controlling his laughter, decided to get the proceedings under control and instructions were shouted out for us all to stop. It all came to a grinding halt. About half of the original contestants were left in the competition. The handler's were worn out and slumped on the grass, as their dogs were left puffing, panting and gasping for water in the hot sunshine.

There was one thing that everyone had lost sight of though. Everyone that is, except for myself and a large black Standard Poodle. We glared at each other as it dawned on both of us that we were the only ones left standing with our tails still in wag mode. It was a two-dog race. The judge eyed the remaining entrants and, one by one, they were asked to step back until there were only three of us left standing in the front.

Not surprisingly those that remained were the Standard Poodle, a stud dog led by the son of a local dog breeder, and the woman with the silly grin on her face who was leading me, (I really do disown her sometimes). What Laura Ashley and her Boxer dog were still doing in the competition was a mystery to me at that point. She should have been disqualified at the outset, as her dog did not have the right credentials for the 'Waggy Tail' class. We all waited with baited breath as the tanoy crackled into action ready for the results to be announced.

I was still in shock as we left the ring. The Poodle came second, I came third and Laura Ashley came FIRST! As the judge presented her with a very fancy rosette I heard her whisper "Thank you Grandpa".

Can you believe it I was flabbergasted. Beaten by a male prostitute and a dog with no tail!! Now, a year on, it is almost show time again. My tail is honed and in the peak of fitness, and 'she' has been to the local charity shop and purchased a pretty pink, floral print, Laura Ashley frock. While it might not give her the appearance of youthful fresh innocence, it does however, show an awful lot of cleavage!!