

WINNING BIG
To the Owner-Handler

By Linda Hazen Lewin

So you've brought your best dog to The Big One at last
With your heart and your hopes on your sleeve,
And you think about all of the shows in your past
Leading up to this One, you believe.

Outside, the professional handlers' rigs
Show off license plates local and foreign;
Their clients are Wall Street and Hollywood 'wigs
Named Cosby and Shatner and Lauren.

They've been here before and they've done this before
And they all seem sublimely blasé.
Their confidence oozes from every pore
Like they know that today is their day.

Their dogs all have records as long as your arm
And owners with bank books to match.
So what are YOU doing here, straight off the farm,
And feeling not quite up to scratch?

You try to review all the things that were said
In the handling class last December.
But as the blood pounds through your heart and your head
You just know there's too much to remember.

'If you can't take the heat then get out of the kitchen'
They all say when the heat's overbearing,
But 'they' don't have to cope with the ache from the stitch in
Your ribs and the new shoes you're wearing.

Then you happen to glance at the dog by your side
As you wait to go into the ring,
And he's gazing back at you with such love and pride
That your trembling heart starts to sing.

"What a beautiful dog!" you declare to the air
And you know that he is – he's the best.
And you've raised him and trained him and groomed him with care;
He DESERVES to be here with the rest!

So you gather your courage and gather your lead
And stride into the ring with a will
'Cause you know that your dog is the best of his breed
Yet regards you superior still.

And despite what you thought, you recall what you're taught
As you show off your charge to perfection;
But you know you won't care if it all comes to naught
And the judge makes another selection.

For it's far from the cameras, the lights and the crowd
That your dog's proved the steadiest friend;
In high times or low times his head stayed unbowed
And on you he has come to depend.

"Take them around the ring one more time, please!"
The judge says, with tri-color in hand;
And you and your dog as a team fly with ease
Round the ring, past the reviewing stand.

And the metronome beat of your dog's steady feet
Courses on unperturbed by the crowd.
And he shines like a hero whose triumph's complete;
Like a ship, flags a-flying and proud.

And the toil and the tears of the years fall away
As you feel electricity flow;
And you soar with the gods as the judge turns your way,
Points to YOUR dog, and says "Best in Show"!