

## DAVIS

### Ron Davis: A Biography

Sometime around 1960, we were looking in the encyclopedia for dog breeds and the Westie perked our interest. Shortly thereafter we attended the Orange Empire KC benched dog show in San Bernardino, California to look at Westies and other breeds. There we met a veteran breeder, Laura Sutherland, and she introduced us to the breed and sold us our first young bitch with a promise that we would show her. To give me experience in the show ring, Laura asked me if I would show “Robin”, as a “filler”, so she could gain championship points for her best dog that she would show as a breeder. She spent a day showing me what to do and gave me a book to read on showing dogs. Laura was an older woman and was of the old school where Westies were shown “naturally” with a minimum of grooming. From what I had witnessed, dogs like Ch Famecheck Viking, a local big winner at the time, were very well groomed and many were shown by professional handlers. I took Robin home and did the best I could in tidying him up to make him more presentable. I don’t recall which class Robin was entered in, but I do remember that I kept being recalled in to the ring to win another blue ribbon. When it was all over, I had taken Robin to Best of Winners, beating out Laura’s best to make an exciting moment for me. It was a tremendous feeling to show a dog and win, so this was a new beginning for our entire family as we all became involved.

Then reality set in, Glencaven Starlette, the bitch we bought from Laura that was supposed to be of show quality, had a very soft, fluffy coat, was straight in the shoulders, and didn’t hold her tail up. She was sweet but couldn’t win anything but last place. As I said in the previous paragraph, Laura was a breeder of the old school when Westies were rare and anything taken into the ring could win a ribbon. Times were changing and knowledgeable dog people were importing good dogs from England and winning at the shows. These dogs were also being bred to quality bitches, which were dramatically improving the breed. Laura Sutherland, bless her soul, was not keeping up with the progress being made, as the breeding was improving rapidly.

I began studying the breed and talking to other breeders. Dee Burdick had some influence on me and became a close friend. I could find no one who had good dogs to sell at that time. I contacted Mrs. McKinney, an English breeder, owner of the famous Freshney Kennels, and she had a fourteen-month-old male she would sell. We purchased Freshney Frisken six months after we purchased Starlette. Frisken was a good Westie, short in back, with a nice tail set, but his coat could have been harder and he had a straight rear. He made up for his deficiencies with his excellent showmanship but usually came in second when shown. Meanwhile, my wife, Nancy, was training Starlette in Obedience and completed her work for her Companion Dog title; that was quite a challenge. By now, the entire family was attending dog shows most weekends.

We were still looking for the dog that we could show and win with, but the more we looked, the more elusive became the prize. I wrote to John Marvin, author of *The Complete West Highland Terrier* and a highly respected judge, for advice on obtaining a

good dog. He explained that most breeders keep the best for themselves and sell the rest. His recommendation was to purchase the best bitch we could find and breed her to a good stud dog and hope for the best. I had been corresponding with Jean Goddard, Kirkaldy Kennels, in Michigan about grooming as she was one of the few who would share techniques. Subsequently, we heard that she became seriously ill and was being forced to dispose of her breeding stock. By the time we heard, most of her good dogs had been sold but she had one bitch, Roxanne, that she considered was the best she had ever produced and she was available. We jumped at the chance and I will never forget putting her on the grooming stand when we got her home. She was absolutely beautiful. When we brought her into the house with the other two dogs, she immediately took control. Starlette was totally dominated by Roxanne and had to be fed separately. Roxanne liked Frisken and they got along fine, but four months after we brought Roxanne, we found Starlette a new home because she was so intimidated.

We became good friends with Barbara Keenan when she moved to California and had just won Best in Show at Westminster with Ch. Elfinbrook Simon. We bred Roxanne to Simon as they were a great match for line breeding and complimented each other physically as well. The result was seven puppies, four of which became champions and Jenessey became our kennel name. Subsequent litters produced four more champions and Ch. Kirkaldy's Roxanne today is tied for the record of top producing bitch, having been the dam of eight champions. We kept Wynken and Myney, the two best puppies from the litter and they both became champions. Our two daughters were involved in junior handling and Nancy loved the visiting and the watching at the shows.

In the show ring, Roxanne was in full control, acting like she owned the ring. She dominated the ring as other bitches seemed to give way to her and she made her championship easily.

During those years in Southern California, I was mentored by so many people. I spent one weekend with Frank Brumby (Rannoch-Dune), for the purpose of studying the breed. Others that come to mind include Katharine Hayward (Huntinghouse), Doris Eisenberg (Kar-Ric) Dee Burdick (Dannyquest) B. G. Frame (Wigtown), Dave and Roberta Mocabee (Happymac) and numerous others. Of course, Barbara Keenan was a huge influence and a good friend. John Marvin was so cooperative and helpful to this young eager breeder and student of the breed.

My experience and study got me assigned to a national committee to revise the Westie Standard, which was quite an honor. I was elected secretary of the West Highland Club of Southern California, Barbara Keenan was president and later I became an AKC approved judge of five terrier breeds. Our home had become part kennel with one bedroom devoted to dog crates and kennel quarters. In order to keep our position as human beings, we had to sever several of our dogs. Frisken went to the Blacks in Beverly Hills where he lived in a house with an elevator and went to work every day in a limousine with his master. When we moved to Dallas, we had only Roxanne, Myney and Wynken. Wynken did not turn out to be a very good brood bitch and she was bought by Judy Hilliker who showed her successfully, but she did not produce many offspring.

When I look back, Ch. Cruben Dextor was my ideal as a Westie. I never put my hands on him as he was shown before my time in the breed but I have studied photos. He appears to have had well laid back shoulders and a good rear with wonderful expression. One of my first oil paintings was of this dog.

When we moved to Texas in 1965, my exposure to quail hunting over Pointers perked my interest in sporting dogs. Three years later, we moved to Boston and breeding and showing Westies gave way to working with German Shorthaired Pointers and field trialing. Also my frequent corporate moves caused me to lose contact with Westie people. Later when we moved to New Jersey, I became active in the Eastern German Shorthaired club as field trial chairman and later president. Trialing and judging field trials finally gave way to aged dogs and a final transfer to Chicago without dogs. We retired to Pinehurst, North Carolina in 1992 for a life of world travel and golf. Fine dogs have been a wonderful part of our life and so many great memories.

In my opinion the greatest book for any judge or breeder is McDowell Lyon's book, *The Dog in Action*. The book is a study of anatomy and locomotion in all breeds of dogs as well as other animals. The West Highland White Terrier breed will only succeed if we judge and breed for soundness in structure as well as type and appearance. The Westie coat makes it easy to cover many structural faults; therefore it is important to judge what is underneath that coat and how the dog moves.