

Tootie's Black Beauties

Before Tootie Longo began breeding black Great Danes, none had ever won the National Specialty, and it had been 22 years since a Dane had won an all-breed show. Black Great Dane bitches were almost a rarity at dog shows.

In love with the breed, particularly black Danes, Tootie was sparked by the challenge of breeding blacks that could compete with the more popular fawn and brindle Danes. “People said you couldn’t win with blacks. They were either too course or didn’t have enough substance,” she says.

A petite blonde, Tootie and her black gentle giants have made a mark in Great Dane history. She has had three National Specialty winners, multiple Best in Specialty Show winners, and three all-breed Best in Show winners. Tootie bred and owned the No. 1 Great Dane in all systems in 1993, which happened to be a bitch, BIS BISS CH Longo’s Sweettalk v. MichaelDane, and the No. 1 male Dane in all systems in 1984, BIS BISS CH Longo’s Chief Joseph. Her dogs have received eight Awards of Merit and have won the Top Twenty three times at the Great Dane Club of America (GDCA) National Specialty.

Known for their friendly, docile temperaments, magnificent heads and sleek, muscular bodies, Tootie’s Great Danes are part of a pedigree with an unbroken line of 10 champion sires. The owner of Longo’s Kennel in Mentor, Ohio, Tootie says, “We’ve done a lot of line-breeding because the gene pool is small and because it’s an extraordinary bloodline. Our dogs go back to Council Parker’s breeding. CH Ebony Chazé of Eagle is behind all our dogs.”

Tootie and her husband, Joe, got involved with dogs as a hobby more than 30 years ago. “Traveling to dog shows was something we could do together on the weekends to get away from work,” Tootie says. Owners of family-operated Italian restaurants and

pizzerias, the Longos at one time had as many as eight restaurants in the Cleveland area.

Joe Longo and Patricia Ward met in high school in Wickliffe, Ohio. Her maternal grandfather coined the nickname “Tootsie,” which was shortened to “Tootie.” Dogs were part of the picture from the beginning. Tootie bought Joe a German Shepherd Dog named “Primo”

while they were still in high school. Married in 1961, Joe and Tootie had two children, Tina and Joey, during the next several years. In 1968, they bought their first pizza business in Mentor.

“I always wanted a Dane, always loved them,” Tootie says.

In 1969, Joe and the children surprised Tootie with a 3-month-old black Great Dane puppy they chose from a litter advertised in the newspaper. “We chose the biggest, fattest dog without knowing what to look for,” Joe recalls. “It turned out that the litter came from a stud dog belonging to the notable AKC (American Kennel Club) judge and breeder Sam Pizzino.”

“We had no intention of showing the dog. We bought it to be a pet,” Tootie says. But when Longo’s Genghis Kahn turned 6 months old, a friend handled him in an all-breed puppy match at the local Painesville Fairground. The puppy won its breed and the Working Group.

“That was it. We were hooked,” Joe says.

The next 10 years were busy raising the children and “fiddling around with dog shows,” Tootie says. At one time, eight Danes lived with them. Family getaways sometimes revolved around dog shows, such as the Pittsburgh Specialty or the Florida Circuit.

By the early 1980s, Tina and Joey were all but grown, and Tootie began to campaign seriously with CH Longo’s Chief Joseph (“Cheech”). In 1983 and 1984, Cheech was the No. 1 Great Dane



Tootie tosses a ball for James in the outdoor kennel area.



Tootie and Joe Longo with Sugar, left, and James in their family room. Tootie's Danes live in their home, but sleep in their indoor kennels at night. An elegant and distinguished breed, Great Danes are believed to have come from the crossing of an Irish Wolfhound and the old English Mastiff. "People are shocked at how nice they are," Tootie says. "Danes have to have good temperament and be under control."

male in all systems and the first black Dane to win the GDCA National Specialty. He also was the first black Dane to win an all-breed show in 22 years, the second in breed history, when he won the Langley (Va.) Kennel Club Dog Show in 1984. The winner of 13 specialty shows, Cheech became Tootie's foundation dog, siring 19 champions.

Two of Cheech's progeny, CH Longo's Primo D'Aquino ("Primo") and CH Longo's Prima Vera ("Prima Vera"), were knockouts themselves. Primo won the Regional in 1988, three Awards of Merit and was Tootie's first Top Twenty winner. An Award of Merit is an honor a judge bestows on Danes of exceptional quality in the breed at the National Specialty, and the Top Twenty is a prestigious award given to the highest scoring dog among the top 20 dogs in the breed. Primo also may become the first black Great Dane to be inducted into the GDCA Hall of Fame.

A dog must sire 30 champions to qualify. So far, Primo, who died in 1992, has sired 23 champions, but Tootie still has some of his frozen sperm.

Meanwhile, Prima Vera finished her championship title in just one week during the 1988 Cherry Blossom Circuit. Tootie took her home and brought her out months later for the National Specialty, which she won, outcompeting Primo who was in the breed class. Prima Vera also won the first Award of Merit given by the national parent club. The 1988 National Specialty was the first independent GDCA specialty. Before this, the specialty was held in conjunction with the annual Westchester County (N.Y.) all-breed show.

Then along came two bitches bred from Primo. CH Longo's Sweettalk of MichaelDane ("Lou-Lou") was the No. 1 Great Dane in the country in all systems in 1993. Lou-Lou won two Awards of Merit, the Top Twenty Award in 1995, and became the first black



James watches Tootie intently as she prepares his breakfast in the indoor kennel. James weighs nearly 200 pounds and is fed 8 cups of *Purina Pro Plan* brand Chicken & Rice Adult Formula a day.

bitch to win an all-breed show when she won the Sandusky (Ohio) Kennel Club Dog Show in 1993. Lou-Lou also won the breed at the 1994 Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

A feminine version of Primo, CH MJB's Black with Sugar ("Sugar"), whom Tootie co-owns with Lorraine Brown of Tempe, Ariz., received both the Top Twenty Award and an Award of Merit in 2001. After only one year of being shown as a special in 2000, Sugar



"I wanted to show that black Danes were as competitive as the other colors," Tootie says. And, that she has. Her Danes have won eight Awards of Merit, above, and the Top Twenty, left, three times. Judges choose Danes of exceptional quality in the breed for an Award of Merit; the Top Twenty is given to the highest scoring dog among the top 20 dogs in the breed. Both awards are given at the Great Dane Club of America National Specialty.

was the No. 1 Great Dane bitch in all systems. Sugar is the dam of two recent Longo champions: CH Longo's James Brown ("James"), who finished at 16 months old, and CH Longo's Brown Sugar ("Sugar"), who finished from the puppy class. James, who is 2, will be shown as a special when he matures, Tootie says.

Another recent champion is CH Longo's Alana Fontana, a frozen sperm puppy out of Primo, who is traveling the Florida circuit with handler Laura Pyles. "This is the first time I've let a dog go away to be shown," Tootie says. Usually the dogs live with

her and Joe, and they take them to meet their handlers at weekend dog shows. Her dogs are family members, and it shows in their confident, outgoing personalities.

A careful breeder, Tootie has radiographs taken of her dogs' hips to help rule out hip dysplasia as well as heart and thyroid tests performed to help ease concerns about heart conditions or hypothyroidism. Longo's Kennel has a new litter every two or three years, and the puppies, which never go to strangers, typically are sold before they are born.

Attuned to the importance of allowing Danes to mature slowly, Tootie feeds both her adult dogs and puppies *Purina Pro Plan* brand Chicken & Rice Adult Formula. "It's very important that the puppies are not overfed to help support a healthy growth rate," she says. "*Pro Plan* is the only dry food our puppies would eat with nothing on it. In the beginning, it shocked me." Her adult dogs, which may weigh nearly 200 pounds, are fed 8 cups of food a day — half in the morning and half at night.

Reflecting on the past 30 years, Joe says, "It's been great, traveling to the shows, meeting people and going to some of the best restaurants in the United States. Tootie did all the breeding. I just went along for the ride."

Well, not entirely. Joe served as the Central Division chairman of the 2002 Great Dane Club of America National Specialty held in Fort Mitchell, Ky. He spent two years helping to plan the event, which drew 900 dogs, making it the record largest Great Dane specialty with the largest Futurity.

Breeding and showing Danes has "turned into a lifestyle," Tootie says. "Our dogs are very competitive. They're easy keepers, and they love being with people. I wouldn't know what to do without my dogs." ■



Friendly and playful, James and Sugar tussle with toys throughout the day.



Joe gives Tootie all the credit for breeding their champion Danes. "She doesn't breed just to breed," he says. "She has a great eye in choosing pedigrees and making good breeding matches. I just went along for the ride." Indeed, Joe travels with Tootie to all the dog shows, but he also was the Central Division chairman of the 2002 Great Dane Club of America National Specialty.