





The Art of Whippets

In the cool shade beneath a stilted house near Tampa Bay in Florida, a 12-year-old Whippet called “Halle” greets a visitor at the chain-link gate with silent curiosity. Several more Whippets can be seen across the backyard from the wooden deck above Multi-BIS CH Karasar’s Reminiscent, ROM.

Like Halle, they watch with interest through large, dark eyes. In spacious 14-by-26-foot exercise areas that bookend a small kennel, the dogs stand steadfastly, as if live sculptures. In a sense, these Whippets are one breeder’s works of art. That’s how Kerrie Kuper of Karasar Whippets in St. Petersburg, Fla., views them.

For more than 40 years, since Kerrie was a child learning at the sides of her parents, her ambition has been to produce artistic perfection in Whippets. Fourteen generations later, Kerrie still aspires to that goal. Several of her breeder-owner-handled dogs have achieved — and fulfilled — apropos titles. Among them are: BISS CH Karasar’s Artistry (“Darbee”), the No. 1 Whippet in the country in 2008 and the dam of a promising 5-month-old puppy named Karasar’s Masterpiece (“Juliet”); BIS CH Karasar’s Par Excellence (“Laynee”); and Multi-BIS CH Karasar’s Essence (“Elle”), named for her fashion magazine cover-model appeal.

In the white-tiled living room of their home, Kerrie and her husband, Neil Barthelette, the owner of a dog grooming shop, are enveloped by other forms of Whippet artwork. Framed prints, *Purina Chosen By Champions* ads featuring Kerrie and/or Multi-BIS/Multi-BISS CH Karasar’s Preference, ROMX (“Pearl”), and porcelain plates won at dog shows adorn the walls. A stained-glass Whippet hangs in a window, and a silver, engraved award bowl holds ribbons and dog toys next to the couch. Whippet collectibles fill two glass-front cabinets.

Kerrie Kuper poses with “Elle” and “Laynee,” the two most recent generations of a five-generation line of Karasar Whippets to win Best in Show.

The items on display are a fraction of what could be. Having downsized their home years ago in an attempt to simplify life, Neil says that in Kerrie’s decades of receiving honors, there isn’t room for everything. She has donated much of the shiny

hardware to kennel clubs and given items to friends, family and up-and-coming handlers.

“We’re from the Sixties,” Kerrie says. “We’re not really into material things.”

That may explain a lot.

Kerrie was sure dogs would be her life, though she didn’t aim to make a living from breeding. After seeing breeder-owner-handler Patricia Trotter in action in the mid-1960s with her Norwegian Elkhounds at the International Kennel Club of Chicago Dog Show, Kerrie saw her future.

“I wanted to be a breeder-owner-handler just like Pat,” she says. “She was my idol, my inspiration.”

Nearly 30 years later, in 1991, all-breed judge Joe Tacker put up two of Kerrie’s puppies as Best of Breed and Best of Opposite Sex at the Brevard Kennel Club Dog Show — calling them works of art.

“That statement resonated,” says Kerrie. “That’s how I’d always thought about them, but I hadn’t put the words together. Like an artist, you don’t become a breeder to make money. I was, and am, in it for the dogs.”

Kerrie notes that Neil is not only a hugely supportive husband, he also speaks more eloquently on her behalf than she sometimes can herself.



Neil Barthelette holds Elle, who was the No. 2 Whippet in 2005 and won the American Whippet Club Top Twenty competition that year.



Kerrie and Neil are shown with, from left, Laynee, "Halle" and Elle in the fenced, one-acre backyard at their St. Petersburg, Fla., home.

"She breeds for her eyes, no one else's," he says.

"If you handle or breed for others, you're influenced by their opinions and desires," she says.

"Then you have to compromise — and you're not good at compromising," Neil says, teasingly. "Thank goodness you didn't go that way."

Kerrie laughs too hard to disagree. Though Karasar Whippets is essentially Kerrie's alone, she happily concedes Neil makes it possible. They've been a strong match, centered on dogs, for 30 years.

The Beginning

As the oldest of four children — three girls, one boy — Kerrie grew up in the Chicago suburb of Park Ridge, Ill. Dogs were a family affair, first with Poodles, which Kerrie began showing as a Junior Handler at age 8. Then, the family switched to Whippets.

"My parents wanted a breed that they didn't have to work so hard to groom," Kerrie says.

Her mother, Arlene Kuper, owned The Clip Shop, a dog grooming business in Niles, Ill. "When you own

a dog grooming business, you don't want to come home to spend a lot of time and effort grooming your own dogs, too."

Kerrie, her sisters and brother all were Junior Handlers. At 10 years old, Kerrie's first Whippet litter was whelped under the prefix Karasar, which is a combination of Kerrie's and her sister Sara's names. "Instead of the 'E's' from my name we used 'A's,' because it seemed to look better," she says. The only Kuper child to continue with dogs, Kerrie claimed the Karasar name.



Kerrie, at 11 years old, won Best of Breed from the Bred-by-Exhibitor class with Karasar's Silver Sassfras.

At the 1968 Stone City Kennel Club Dog Show in New Lenox, Ill., Kerrie won Best of Breed from the Bred-by-Exhibitor class with a Whippet named Karasar's Silver Sassfras. "Sassy" outperformed three champions to give the young breeder-owner-handler her first of many noteworthy wins.

"I won that and thought, 'OK, this is what I want to do with the rest of my life,'" she recalls. "That one day set the tone for my life with the breed. I knew I wanted to be a breeder-owner-handler of Whippets. It was an epiphany."

Besides the mentoring of her parents, Kerrie notes

a few others who guided her. In particular was Cal Perry, who owned CH Appraxin Surefire, the stud dog of the Kupers' first litter of Whippets. Perry coincidentally was from St. Petersburg, where Kerrie has lived since college.

"Cal was very nice to me when I moved to Florida from Illinois in my early 20s," she says. "He was very encouraging."

A good friend and confidante was Peggy Newcombe, the owner of CH Courtenay Fleetfoot of Pennyworth, the 1964 Best in Show Westminster winner, the only Whippet to win at the Garden. From the early 1980s until Newcombe died in 2007, they spent hours discussing the ins and outs of the breed.

"They were very similar," Neil says. "Both had a love for the breed, and they really hit it off when they met. They shared a vision of the perfect Whippet, and appreciated each others' knowledge about the breed in a way not many could."

"When I was a kid, I lived and breathed dogs, researching them, their pedigrees and who were the top winners," Kerrie says. "Peggy had a top kennel in the 1960s, so I knew all about 'Mrs. Whippet' before I met her."

Kerrie credits former professional handler and American Kennel Club representative Tom Glassford with teaching her the art of campaigning dogs at a high level. "Tom and his wife, Andrea, showed me what it takes to go for top rankings," Kerrie says. "They showed me you have to really travel and get your dogs out there."

Neil understands the rigors well. He also has been a dog enthusiast since around the age of 10, when he surprised his parents by buying and carrying home a Miniature Poodle. A lifelong Tampa Bay resident, Neil entered dog grooming school after high school. He worked as a groomer in Tampa and enjoyed a brief career as a handler, mostly showing toy breeds.

That explains why Kerrie gave Neil a 3-pound Chihuahua, CH Karasar's All About Audrey, for his birthday a few years ago. She has since showed the dog to a Top Twenty ranking. "Audrey" lives in the house and greets visitors with as much curiosity as the Whippets, if with much less silence.

Neil opened Alphonse Grooming, named after his father, in 1973 in St. Petersburg. Kerrie, having moved from Illinois and enrolled at the University of South Florida in Tampa in 1980, called Neil about adding Saturday grooming work to her full academic schedule and the full-time job she already had. Having begun grooming dogs at 10 years old, Kerrie

was direct, telling Neil, "You'd be lucky to have me." He believed her.

Within a couple of months, they went on a dinner date, upon which Kerrie ordered the cheapest item on the menu. "That's when I knew it was love," Neil jokes. A week after Kerrie graduated college in 1983, they got married. The following month, the first Karasar Whippets to be whelped in Florida came along.

Making Art and History

Kerrie breeds one or two litters a year, keeping one puppy from each. She believes strongly in breeding a distinctive bloodline. "People have told me over the years that my dogs are like clones," Kerrie says. "I am very proud that they are identifiable as Karasar Whippets."

The key, she says, is to understand that when pairing dogs, it's not



Kerrie tosses a toy for, from left, BISS CH Karasar's Artistry ("Darbee"), Karasar's Mlynarz Arabica ("Beckie"), Karasar's Mlynarz Kona ("Henri") and CH Karasar's Dreamiest ("Dreamee") to chase. Karasar Whippets exercise freely in the fenced backyard for hours each day.

those two dogs' characteristics that will prevail. "You have to consider the faults and virtues of the four grandparents," says Kerrie. "I try to look at the virtues more than the faults, but if the two grandsires and the two granddams all have the same fault, say, their shoulders are too straight and don't lay back properly, then that is what you'll get in the puppies."

"It takes a great eye to choose a good dog when producing no more than two litters a year," Neil says. "The continual improvement and number of champions Kerrie has produced is incredible."

There are usually fewer than eight adult Whippets living at the Karasar



"Guy" started a five-generation line of Best in Show winners in 1997, when he won Best in Show at the Michigan Kennel Club Dog Show.



At right: Elle was the fourth of five generations to win Best in Show. Below: Pearl was the second generation.



Halle, who was out of Pearl and is Elle's dam, was the third generation Best in Show winner.

At left: When Laynee won Best in Show at the Saline County Kennel Club of Arkansas Dog Show in 2009, she became the fifth generation to win Best in Show.

as she remembers saying, "You won't be mad if we get Best in Show; that will make it all better."

Kerrie has since bred, owned and handled seven Best in Show winners. A five-generation line began with a male, Multi-BIS CH Karasar's Beguiled ("Guy"), followed by four generations of bitches: Pearl, Halle, Elle and Laynee.

Meanwhile, a three-generation Best in Show bitch line began with Pearl, followed by BIS CH Karasar's Temptress ("Tessy") and Multi-BIS CH Karasar's Audacity ("Cassy"). Tessy was the No. 1 breeder-owner-handled Whippet in 1998. Elle and Cassy were both ranked among the Top 10 Whippets in all-breed competition in 2004.

Last year, Karasar's top-producing sire, CH Karasar's Impressive ("Ferris"), died at 12 years old. Ferris sired Cassy; Multi-BIS CH Karasar's Audacity; Darbee, the No. 1 Whippet in 2008; and CH Karasar's Jaama Mandate ("Mandy"), a Top 20 Whippet who lives in Taiwan with owner Wei Wei Chang. Ferris is the great-grand sire of CH Karasar's Jester, the No. 1 Whippet in Japan in 2009 on loan to Genji Ozeki.

Another one of Ferris' progeny is COL CH Karasar's Glamorous, the No. 1 Whippet in Colombia, South America, in 2009. Owner Nicolas Debedout of Eucaliptus Whippets is a second-generation fan of Karasar Whippets. In the early 1980s, Kerrie contacted Debedout's parents when she learned they had acquired a bitch she bred.

Elle was the No. 2 Whippet in 2005, when she outperformed the No. 1 Whippet and won the American Whippet Club Top Twenty competition under three

breeder judges. Pearl and Darbee are the only two breeder-owner-handled Whippet bitches to attain No. 1 in all-breed competition. Pearl also is the only No. 1-ranked Whippet bitch to produce two Best in Show winners: Halle and Tessy.

Darbee's female puppy, Juliet, has yet to be shown, but Kerrie is excited about what might be. Juliet reminds Kerrie of Pearl, another example of the consistency of Karasar Whippets. "Preference was one of the best I've ever bred," Kerrie says. "Juliet is her granddaughter. She's the only Whippet we've produced who I haven't found a fault with, at least not yet. I've told so many people that, they're sick and tired of hearing it, but it's exciting for me."

Kerrie says Juliet has it all: smooth flowing lines; correct balance and bone; pretty Whippet head and quintessential "rose" ears, small and folded along her neck; and soft, pleasing expression.

"Though it's not just about the breeding and looks of the dog," she says. "Training and raising them right is a huge part of it, too."

kennel at any time. All the dogs are socialized and accustomed to house living, getting turns going into the house.

Karasar celebrated its first Best in Show with Pearl, who became the No. 1 Whippet in the country in 1994 and 1995. That was the year Pearl won Best in Show at the North Lake Kennel Club of Greater Covington (La.) Dog Show in Bay St. Louis, Miss.

The success coincided with Neil and Kerrie's 12th wedding anniversary. Neil wasn't happy Kerrie would be gone, but they laugh these years later,

A True Sporting Hound

Capable of running 35 miles per hour, the Whippet, with his Greyhound-like appearance, evolved with the English working class as a utility dog to provide rabbits for the table, racing sport in leisure time and companionship. British immigrants brought the breed to America, where the Whippet was recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1888.

The Whippet's muscular power and strength balanced with elegance and grace depict a true sporting hound. Today, the breed excels in sports such as agility, obedience, flyball, lure coursing and flying disc. Their gentle demeanor makes them well-suited for therapy work.

Karasar Whippet breeder Kerrie Kuper most admires the breed's quiet, friendly temperament and intelligence. "They are friendly with strangers, not shy or nervous," she says. "Though they have a catlike independence, they are easily trainable and charismatic in the show ring."

Source: *The Complete Dog Book*, Official Publication of the American Kennel Club. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006.)



Multi-BIS CH Karasar's Essence

Because she travels frequently, attending 70 or more dog shows each year, Kerrie introduces all puppies at 7 weeks old to the road, taking an overnight trip several hours from home.

Grooming requires a weekly nail trim using a dremel. Dogs being shown are bathed the day before a competition. Kerrie trims facial whiskers, ear hair and cowlicks on the neck, thighs and rear.

Nutrition is important to help "keep the dogs' coats in excellent condition, and to provide the protein they need to maintain their high energy levels," Kerrie says. Kerrie feeds her dogs *Purina Pro Plan Shredded Blend Natural Lamb & Rice Formula* and *Purina ONE Lamb & Rice Formula*.

Hours of daily exercise in the fenced, one-acre backyard, plus a few jogs each week alongside Kerrie on her bicycle, help maintain the Whippets' sleek brindle-and-white bodies. Karasar males typically weigh around 35 pounds, while females are 28 pounds.

"These dogs are usually either standing or running," says Kerrie. "They don't sit, and they don't run slowly off lead. When I ride the bike, they learn to trot beside me.

It trains them for gaiting in the ring and further helps to maintain their muscle tone."



Karasar Whippets, including Darbee and Dreamee, are fed *Purina Pro Plan Shredded Blend Natural Lamb & Rice Formula*.

Though Karasar Whippets has produced nearly 100 champions, Kerrie is proudest of her five generations of Best in Show winners. It shows consistency and progress toward breeding the perfect Whippet. "It's taken me 40 years, but now I can honestly say that in every litter we produce, there is Best in Show potential," she says. "The key word is 'potential.'"

Kerrie picks her favorite potential winner from each litter, then suffers at seeing the others go with new owners. "She doesn't let go of dogs easily," Neil says. "She once sold a dog to people in Chicago. She delivered the dog to them, and when she came home, she got off the plane in tears. I asked, 'What's wrong?' and she said, 'I don't want to give up that dog. You're going to have to call and tell them we can't live without him.' I tore up the check, and we sent them Halle's sire, CH Karasar's Handsome Is.

"Kerrie is like an artist who doesn't want to give away any paintings," says Neil. "She just has such a passion for them, a total, burning passion. She's dedicated her life to them."

"He's right. After 30 years of marriage, Neil knows me better than I know myself," Kerrie says. "It's just hard for me to put into words exactly why I think Whippets are so beautiful. It's like trying to describe love." ■

Creating Champions

Kerrie and Neil turn their dining room into a whelping room for each litter. Kerrie cuddles the puppies, rubbing their bellies to start socializing them before their eyes even open. "As soon as they are strong enough to stand, I start setting them up daily on the countertop, just for a second or two to get them used to being up there," Kerrie says. "At 3 to 4 weeks old, they start walking."

At 3 weeks old, each puppy also starts hearing Kerrie say "cookie" whenever she puts food in front of them. As they get older, their ears perk at that sound, creating an alert expression that judges will appreciate.

At 3 to 4 months of age, the puppies are trained to walk on lead. "I walk the puppy's mother, and put a retractable lead on the puppy," says Kerrie. "That gives him slack, and he usually follows his mother. It only takes once or twice to learn how to walk on lead."



Kerrie brushes Laynee's short brindle-and-white coat amid some of the many ribbons awarded to Karasar Whippets.