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The Santa Clarita Valley's Poshest Pooch

■ Ms. Mia Princessa Ruckelhausen of Valencia, a 6-year-old miniature dachshund, wins coveted contest.

By Michael Haskin
Special to the Signal

Mrs. Mia, Pam Ruckelhausen, may be tiny, but she's a fierce competitor. This week, she'll compete in America's Top Dog Model competition in Boca Raton, Fla., against some 2,000 canines from around the nation.

"I always say as the only time winning seems a dog's job is when it's competing in a dog show," she says. "This is our first year at the national level so we're like novices. It's kind of like the first time you go to a rodeo."

"My sister named her — actually her mom is M.J., the mom — she was named after a famous actress. When I was reading that my older sister (she's 21) had won America's Top Dog Model, I thought 'Wow, I want to do that!'"

America's Top Dog Model is organized by the Santa Clarita Valley Dog Model Council. She's a California girl — the city has a little more than a million residents — who's a生力军 in the dog business. Her mom runs an animal-welfare group, Pam's Pet Protection, and the Ruckelhausens call themselves "Team Ruckelhausen." They also have a dog-walking service and a pet-sitting business. Her dad is a dog breeder who's been in the business for 10 years. And her mom has written a book about raising dogs.

At one point, she even had a dog in the logo of the 2000 America's Top Dog Model magazine, and at another, her dog, Mrs. Mia, participated in the Miss California competition. "She ate it up," recalls her mother. "I think she was a bit disappointed when she saw all the girls in the world, but she was still happy because she got to pose with them. After her mom said she could go home, she went home."

"She's just a puppy," says Ruckelhausen. "She's very smart and very curious. She loves to bark at the birds outside her window. She loves to bark at the birds outside her window. She loves to bark at the birds outside her window."

It's over like that, and now it's a full life. She and her mom have moved to a new apartment in Valencia. The Ruckelhausens are new homeowners in Valencia and have a Plumbing Supplies. The model has been with a manager for 13 years. Back to the animal manager and Pam's Pet Protection, which she's been working at since she was 10 years old.

"I used to be afraid of dogs," says Ruckelhausen. "But now I love them. I'd say I'm not afraid of them at all." She loves dogs, especially her brother, Bo, a Dachshund mix, and her sister, Bella, a Shih Tzu.

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(Above and right) Pamela Ruckelhausen holds Ms. Mia Princessa Ruckelhausen of Valencia, a 6-year-old miniature Dachshund who enjoys her status as America's Top Dog Model. She was crowned in Boca Raton, Fla., in May and will grace the cover of the 2007 America's Top Dog Model calendar as Ms. April. Mia's solid, 14-carat gold crown with Swarovski crystals, weighs more than her head.

"Every time we hear a birth can occur, we know exactly who's to blame," says Pam Ruckelhausen. "But the customers to look forward to seeing the babies."

Mr. Mia's brothers are interested in the high-flying life of a fashion model. Unfortunately, said Ruckelhausen, Brownie went blind three years ago, and Rucks is too old — he's mostly mellow for the lifestyle. But notwithstanding their different paths in life, they get along beautifully, said Pamela Ruckelhausen.

"They live for each other," she said. "And we do everything for them."

Ruckelhausen marvels at the dog's devotion.

"As long as I'm here, they're happy. They live it when we're not here," she says.

Mia especially loves barking, and the family's trips to Tahoe. Ruckelhausen said she learned about Mia's win at the end of May. "I just so proud of her. I'm still in shock. Not that she was, of course. But it's so exciting, it's like a dream come true. My little Princess is finally where she belongs," she said.

"Now you get to attend your own jet, Mia flew American Airlines. She loves the attention and the new things."

"It was her first time ever flying," said Ruckelhausen. "The stewardesses loved her, and on the flight home the captain even came back and said hello to her."

In Boca Raton, all the finalists piled onto a limo for the trip to the Bob and Stacey Interiors showcases for the awards ceremony. Ten dogs in a limo would seem to be a recipe for chaos, but Ruckelhausen said everybody got along fine. Mia got off first and walked down the red carpet in her posh gown. She was a star! After seeing her "pageant" in crimson tile in the style of an old Hollywood star, Mia decided it was time to relieve herself (thankfully not on the carpet).

The contest is the idea of JoJo Hilder, who developed it as a marketing tool two years ago for her soon-to-be-released book on fashion and style for dogs. A designer and stylist for 15 years, Hilder first created spontaneous runway shows in such upscale venues as Nordstrom, Michael Fields, Home Goods, and Saks Fifth Avenue. She has had partnerships with lines such as Lavender Lady and Lavender Baby, which are coordinating mother and child clothing. She intends to collaborate these with collections with an as-yet-unnamed line which will coordinate mother, child and dog. She has not specified if the latter will be fashioned to accommodate the big-and-tall, so to say a Great Dane or a pug pit.

"Dogs make being dressed up look good," said Hilder. "If you dress them up properly, they won't mind if no dog should be forced to wear clothes."

What kind of clothing will the dog's lines comprise? Business suits? Formalwear?

"Maisy likes tuxedos," said Hilder. "This year's contest theme was 'Home is Where the Heart Is.'"

Mrs. Mia's outfit in her pink satin evening dress and turquoise brooch was made by Star Page Design of Stevenson Ranch. But she utilizes other couturiers as well, including Wild and Tame, which has closed its doors in Valencia — but has outlets at the Northridge Fashion Center and Glendale.

Her nails were done in hot pink, her favorite color.

"It goes with her dark fur," said Pamela Ruckelhausen.

"She was just a pup," she added. The event photographer told her he didn't even like dogs, but that Mia won him over. At the awards ceremony she was decked out for the media in a new bracelet her grandmother (who died in June with Ann Shelly from Ojai) had made for her. The entire ring was turquoise.

"The ceremony went so fast," said Pamela Ruckelhausen.

Joining about a hundred people in a gorgeous two-story家庭室 decorated for occasion, and wearing her 14-carat gold crown, Mia posed for pictures on chairs and couches worth thousands of dollars and was interviewed by the local paper.

"That crown is solid," she said. "It weighs more than Mia's head."



After the two-hour event Ms. Princessa went back to her room and rested before heading out to "sneak around" Boca Raton. There's no rest for the weary on a publicity junket.

"Everyone she walked she drew a crowd," said Pamela Ruckelhausen. "A lot of people think she's a puppy even though she's almost 7."

From her shiny coat to her sunny walk to her individual mannerisms, Mia turns heads wherever she goes.

"She has the looks and can give the looks," said Pamela Ruckelhausen. "She really does think she's the princess."

But this doggie diva hasn't let her popularity go to her head.

"She's always very polite," said Pamela Ruckelhausen.

"Mrs. Mia and Bo are always very good dogs," said Hilder. "The entry period for the 2007 America's Top Dog Model competition starts on Sept. 5. So enter now. The proceeds, as with this year, will go to various charities, including the Humane Society of the United States, the Tri-City Humane Society (Boca Raton), and the Florida Humane Society. Pamela Ruckelhausen is similarly committed to using Mia's newfound celebrity for the greater good."

"She needs to go out there and do her duty," she said. "Mia's been very fortunate, and now it's time for her to give back."

What's Being the Pick of the Litter Worth?

- Prizes that Mia won include:
- \$2,000 Nutri-Vet® gift certificate
 - A designer doggy coat from America's Top Dog Model
 - Custom-designed Swarovski crystal crown from Dorothy Bauer Designs
 - 8 luxurious pet clubs from Pet Living
 - Designer pet bed from Pet for People and Pets
 - A one-year membership in New York City dog actor agency the Dog Actors Guild
 - Feature Stories in New York Dog and Hollywood Dog Magazines

Courtesy America's Top Dog Model

To compete in America's Top Dog Model Mia wore a pink satin evening dress with a turquoise brooch.