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Friday, September 8, 2006

# Lifestyle

Published Tuesday, Friday & Sunday  
 Circulation: 100,000, est. 1971

## The Santa Clarita Valley's Poshest Pooch

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

By Susan Jones  
 Photos by Bill Davidson

**M**om says, "You Rank and 'America's Best Dog Model'?"  
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(Above and right) Pamela Ruckelshausen holds Ms. Mia Princess Ruckelshausen 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 most, 14-carat gold crown with Swarovski crystals, weighs more than her head.



"Every time we hear a truck can crush, we know exactly who's to blame," said Ruckelshausen. "But the customer's too forward to seeing the babies."

At Mia's brother's insistence in the high-flying life of a fashion model? Unfortunately, said Ruckelshausen, Ruckelshausen went blind three years ago, and Mia's too old — he's overly mellow for the lifestyle. But notwithstanding their different paths in life, they get along beautifully, said Pamela Ruckelshausen.

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

Ruckelshausen marches at the dog's devotion.

"As long as we're here, they're happy. They like it when we're not here," she said.

Mia especially loves being, and the family's trips to Tahoe. Ruckelshausen said she learned about Mia's win at the end of May.

"I'm just so proud of her. I'm still in shock. Not that she won, of course, but it's so exciting. It's like a dream come true. My little Princess is finally where she belongs," she said.

Not yet quite able to afford her own jet, Mia flew American Airlines to Florida and promptly won the hearts of all the crew.

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

In the Boca Raton, all the studios piled into a line for the trip to the Bobo and Stucky interiors showrooms for the awards ceremony. Ten dogs in a line would soon be a recipe for chaos, but Ruckelshausen said everybody got along fine. Mia got off first and walked the red carpet, posing for the paparazzi (paparazzi?). After getting her "paparazzi" in camera she in the style of an old Hollywood star. Mia decided it was time to relieve herself (mainly off to the carpet).

The contest is the idea of Jo Jo Harlan, 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, Harlan has created sportswear that has sold in such upscale venues as Nordstroms, Marshall Fields, Henri Bendel and Fred Segal. She has had particular success with lines such as Lavender Lady and Lovelace Baby, which are coordinating mother and child outfits. She intends to complement these with collections with an unisex-oriented line which will coordinate mother, child and dog. She has not specified if the latter will be fashioned to accommodate the big-and-tall. Is it say a Great Dane or a pit bull.

Do dogs mind — or do they — being dressed up?

"Some actually enjoy it," said Harlan. "If you dress them as puppies, they won't mind. But no dog should be forced to wear clothes."

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

"Mainly loungewear," said Harlan.

This year's contest's theme was "Hence is Where the Heart Is."

"Mia Ruckelshausen just best revealed the looney style we wanted," said Harlan.

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

Her suits were done in her park, her favorite color.

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

"She was just a bit," she added. The event photographer told her she didn't even get a drink, but that Mia soon blew out. As the awards ceremony she was ducked out for the small in a new bouquet her grandmother (who lives in with Aunt Shelly from Ohio) had made for her. The only sad note?

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

Joining about a hundred people in a gorgeous two-story furnished was decorated for occasion, and wearing her 14-carat gold crown, Mia posed for pictures on chairs and couches worth thousands of



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.

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. Princess went back to her room and rested before heading out to "mose around" Boca Raton. There's no rest for the weary on a publicity junket.

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

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

"She has the look and can give the look," said Pamela Ruckelshausen. "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 Ruckelshausen.

Next year's America's Top Dog Model contest will have a twist-of-theme. The early period begins Jan. 5. Some of the proceeds, as with this year, will go to various charities, including the Humane Society of the United States, the Tri-County Humane Society (Boca Raton), and the Florida Humane Society. Pamela Ruckelshausen 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 a very fortunate, and now it's time for her to give back."

**What's Being the Pick of the Litter Worth?**

Prices that Mia was include:

- A "Coney Island" pillow
- A doggie beach house from America's Top Dog Model
- A custom-designed four-piece cover from Crosby Bower Designs
- A luxurious pet chair from Posh Living
- A designer pet bed from Ted for People and Pets
- A one-year membership in New York City dog-agency the Dog Action Club
- Feature stories in New York Dog and Hollywood Dog Magazines

See Mia's winning style at [www.americastopdogmodel.com](http://www.americastopdogmodel.com)