

RIKI IN NEW YORK
A CANADIAN GSP GOES TO MADISON SQUARE GARDENS
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It has been a childhood dream to take a dog to Madison Square Gardens to participate in the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, and year 2000 was the right time. So "Riki" and I packed our bags and headed off to New York the Friday before the Show to have some time to settle in and sightsee.

In eager anticipation of the trip, I had pored over maps and guide books and I had a wonderful day planned, walking the streets with my dog, and taking in all the sights. The weather was cooperative, sunny, with temperatures in the low 30's (F). But nothing I'd read prepared me for the crowds belching from every building, bus and subway exit, or for the crush of people on the streets, the din of horns and hawkers, or the distinctive Big Apple smell of food, fumes and humanity. Nonetheless, Riki and I were coping quite well until we hit the Empire State Building. I was doing the tourist thing, taking pictures and gawking up, when, without warning, my leash arm was practically yanked from its socket as Riki spied and lunged for a bunch of pigeons on the sidewalk. To my ongoing dismay, I had found another of New York's trademarks, or more correctly, Riki had. From then on, my walking tour was a battle between young hunting dog and not-so-young tourist. There were pigeons everywhere, and all relatively tame, allowing people (and dogs) to come within a couple of feet before moving. Riki dragged me from the Empire State building, up Broadway towards the Theater District and on to Times Square, where my day took a literal downturn. The area around Times Square on a Saturday is a maelstrom of people and vehicles (and pigeons), and there are traffic cops at each intersection. As I waited with the crowd to cross the street, the walk signal came on, and the cop blew his whistle, beep-beep. This signaled Riki to go hunting and she took off across my path after the pigeons. I went flat out face down in the middle of Times Square. People seemed more concerned that my not inconsiderable bulk hadn't landed on the dog, and my mood darkened. But I was determined that we were going to see New York and have fun doing it, dammit. I gritted my teeth and continued on to Rockefeller Center, Radio City Music Hall, St. Patrick's Cathedral and Grand Central. By the time we got back to the Hotel, Riki and I weren't exactly on speaking terms, but eventually I could see the humour.

The next day, I was a bit stiff from my fall but a companion had arrived from B.C. the previous night with her Pointer and we had planned a day at Central Park with the dogs. I was relieved not to see any pigeons in the Park and once again I was looking forward to a pleasant stroll. Then, all of a sudden Riki crouched into a point - there were squirrels everywhere, fat and gray and sassy. The well behaved Pointer froze into an honour, not sure what Riki was pointing but doing what instinct drove him to do. That day turned into a repetition of the previous one, with Riki weaving at the end of the leash, and squirrels replacing pigeons as the object of her obsession. When we got back to the Hotel that evening, Riki added a new twist to her general lack of manners by switching into cockroach mode and staring fixedly behind the headboards of the beds and under the night table, thereby giving the humans some concerns about turning out the lights!

It was almost a relief to give up sightseeing on Monday and to get into the Gardens to see the first day of the Show. My words could not adequately describe the Westminster experience - the crowds, the excitement, the gorgeous dogs in every ring, and especially the Group judging at night under the lights and the TV cameras. Shorthairs were judged on the second day, and Riki was not only the sole Canadian entry but the second youngest competitor at not quite two years of age. She did Canada proud by making it to the judge's final cut in a field of 28 American champion entries. But I have to admit that as she and her handler went into the ring, I slipped him Riki's favourite bait - a pigeon wing brought from home for the occasion!