

Back to earth

Westminster champ tasted a star's life but is now back at work in Newville

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John Hart/Wisconsin State Journal

Kent Boyles, part-owner and handler of the Westminster Kennel Club's 2017 Best in Show winner, Rumor, exercises the prize-winning German shepherd from the seat of a motorized scooter on his property near Edgerton.

NEWVILLE

Rumor has come back to earth just north of the world's largest Culver's.

This is where the
5-year-old
German shepherd
sleeps in a king-
size bed between

her handler and his girlfriend, plays with a Chinese crested hairless a fraction of her size and trots alongside a beat-up motor scooter for exercise just yards from the roaring traffic of Interstate 90/39.

The modest surroundings, which include a farmhouse and an indoor training space in an old hay loft of a more than 60-year-old barn, are home. And where, on Tuesday of last week, the Orkin man pulled out his phone for a quick photo before he went to work ridding mice at the converted farm on a spring-like day in northern Rock County just east of Edgerton.

“Everyone in town is talking about it,” said Mike Bierer, shortly after stepping out of his pest eradication truck. “I was at a bar (after an Elton John concert at Caesar’s Palace) in Las Vegas and looked up (at the TV) and there was a dog from Edgerton.”

The scene for Rumor and her co-owner and handler, Kent Boyles, was full of Las Vegas-like glitz after the prized herder was named Best in Show at the 141st annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at New York’s Madison Square Garden on the night of Valentine’s Day.

When you win the top prize at one of the country’s oldest sporting events, the pampering can be over the top. There was steak the following day at Sardi’s, a trip to the observation deck of the Empire State Building and a visit to “The View.” That’s where Rumor, in a two-minute segment, sidled up next to Whoopi Goldberg and Boyles got a rise out of the five divas behind the desk when he explained that Rumor was now in search of a husband.

“She deserves that,” quipped Sara Haines. “She’s worked really hard.”

Indeed.

Hundreds of dog show appearances, thousands of miles and dollars and over four years of training and competition have brought Rumor and Boyles to the pinnacle of the dog world. And with it, fame that also included a visit to the Nasdaq Stock Market, a trip to The Wall Street Journal and appearances on “Good Morning America” and “Fox & Friends.”

The media attention was more subdued last week with interviews from Madison television stations and Kim Mc-Darison of the Milton Courier and Edgerton.com, [although there also was a visit from a documentary film crew from Seattle](#)

[working for a video dog journal in the United Kingdom.](#)

All the sleep-depriving attention, of course, is good for Boyles' brand, the Kenlyn Kennels he owns with his ex-wife on the other side of the interstate, and for his sponsor, Royal Canin, a pet food company founded in France that has its U.S. headquarters in St. Charles, Missouri, near St. Louis.

"I've been running off adrenaline so I'm a little exhausted," said Boyles, who is in San Antonio, Texas, for another dog show. "If this didn't open the doors right up it sure oiled the ... hinges."

Although, none of this was supposed to happen.

Rumor, named after the Adele song "Rumor Has It," retired after last year's Westminster show when she won the herding group only to see a German shorthaired pointer take home Best in Show and a Borzoi grab Reserve Best in Show. That led Boyles in April to artificially inseminate Rumor with semen from a prized German shepherd in Washington, D.C. Only it didn't take. So instead of trying again in the fall, Boyles and his team of four other owners decided to give the show circuit another shot. That led to 11 show appearances beginning in January in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan and Virginia prior to Westminster,

After winning her group, Rumor, who had 103 Best in Show awards in her career, was one of the favorites at The Garden. She didn't disappoint as she worked the floor with Boyles amid six other dogs, including an Irish setter that was ultimately named Reserve Best in Show. The others were a Norwegian elkhound, a Pekingese, miniature poodle, boxer and Norwich terrier.

Afterward, Boyles and Rumor were mobbed by media. They left the arena at about 12:30 a.m. Feb. 15 for a post-show party across the street before returning to the hotel at about 3 a.m.

They were up three hours later for their daylong media blitz that continued the following day. On the night of Feb. 16, they left New York and drove straight through back to Wisconsin.

"We knew she had potential," Boyles said when asked if he saw a champion when Rumor was born. "We didn't sell her. We knew she was good enough to be kept back to watch and work. We start the training process (early) so if it looks like at six months old they won't be a superstar in the ring, we'll place them in a companion home."

Rumor's show days are now over and this spring she will head to Washington, D.C., for a high-stakes hook-up designed to produce a litter of puppies. Each will likely sell for thousands of dollars.

Boyles, 52, started skipping high school in Wisconsin Rapids so he could go to dog shows. He began by training two Doberman pinschers owned by his English teacher and a German shepherd owned by his guidance counselor. When he was 15, Boyles purchased his first German shepherd and later began working for a breeder in Barron, about 53 miles north of Eau Claire.

Boyles and his then-wife, Lynette Boyles, were living in Superior in the 1980s and showing dogs but moved to southern Wisconsin in the early 1990s to cut down on travel times to dog shows. In 1989, for example, Kent Boyles said they logged 83,000 miles.

In 1993, the couple began building a kennel on the west side of the interstate at Highway 59 just east of Edgerton. The facility offers boarding, grooming, training and a daycare for all types of breeds. They divorced in 2011, with Kent moving into an old farmhouse on the east side of the interstate where he has constructed pens, training yards and other facilities for his dogs.

The barn is the centerpiece and is filled with ribbons, trophies and German shepherd artwork in addition to a 1966 Harley-Davidson Electra Glide that Boyles rarely has time to ride. The barn also serves as a training center for law enforcement canines.

Boyles has known his girlfriend, Liz Oster, most of his life. Her father has been showing German shepherds since the 1950s, and Liz is also a championship handler. They share the house with X, the 3-year-old Chinese crested show dog; a 14-month-old chihuahua and Mittens, a 4-year-old tabby.

“It’s been crazy and unbelievable,” Oster said. “Kent is very passionate about his dogs.”

Rumor, her official name GCh. Lockenhaus’ Rumor Has It V Kenlyn, was born Nov. 15, 2011, and has had a storied career. Her 2017 Best in Show marks just the second time that a German shepherd has won the Westminster crown.

She finished 2014 as the top German shepherd and as the fifth-ranked herding dog, won the Canadian Championship and was named best of breed in the U.S. In 2015, Rumor was ranked first all year in herding, won the AKC Eukanuba National Championship in Orlando and was named best in breed and fourth in the herding group at Westminster.

The whole time, Boyles’ pockets have been stuffed with sausage and bits of steak as an incentive for Rumor to pay attention and follow commands. When he was in New York, that meant restaurant visits for seared ribeye cooked rare and taken away, yes, in a doggie bag.

“It’s almost 500 times that you wind up in there doing the same routine,” Boyles said of competition. “So you have to make sure you keep that dog thinking that it’s the highlight of its day when it goes out there to perform. Your whole world revolves around keeping that dog happy.”