



He's got the look. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it took an online poll to confirm this dog's ugliness. PHOTO BY MICHAEL DERR

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE SQUIGGY

An ugly dog takes his newfound celebrity status in stride

BY MATT KEEFER

So you enjoy two-headed turtles, featherless chickens, and other abominations of nature. But you can't watch Warren Beatty's grotesque villains in "Dick Tracy" for fear of recurring nightmares. There's a welcome medium: shake paws with Squiggy, a mixed Chinese Crested, Japanese Chin breed, who, through some sort of genetic technicality, is still dog enough to enter the online portion of the World's Ugliest Dog contest, which held its finals in Petaluma, Calif., in June.

Yup, that's a Mohawk in the picture.

Owner Jean Cotton doesn't seem to mind. Her "second child" is the unofficial mascot for the Pet Refuge in North Kingstown, which shelters abused and neglected animals. Squiggy finds himself incredibly busy for a dog of his unique countenance, participating in the refuge's open house, making appearances at nursing homes, and glamming up Providence's Pet Expo last March. Cotton adopted the ugly dog two years ago, after it was rescued from a backyard breeder in Massachusetts.

Squiggy's sunshine complexion has brought him newfound fame. "We went to Newport," recounts Cotton, "and we couldn't get down the street. People recognized him and were stopping us; it was just a little too much."

Even as we sit in Wickford Village, people sense something unusual about him. People are naturally drawn to him. As Cotton, an Exeter resident, says, "It's not every day you see a dog with a Mohawk and a tongue hanging out, wrinkles and warts."

A woman stops by and asks if he's in the "beauty contest."

"You mean the World's Ugliest Dog contest?" Squiggy's owner replies.

Cotton is unashamed to mention that little fact about Squiggy: He finished third in the online voting ballot, behind Pee Wee Martini and last year's winner Elwood. "I think Pee Wee does deserve to win," Cotton says. "That is one ugly dog."

But that's not to diminish from Squiggy's own innate ugliness. That buzz-cut hairdo and lolly-

gagging tongue have brought him a Web site, an online store, and the unofficial title of "Rhode Island's Ugliest Dog." Shirts, hats, a mousepad—all of this would normally give a dog a fat head. But Squiggy appears humble about his celebrity status.

"I don't think it's gotten to his head at all. At least not yet." Cotton turns to her dog, "What do you think, Squiggy?"

(Squiggy offers no discernible comment.)

But there's also a practicality to his grotesqueness. Being hairless makes fleas and ticks easy to spot; he's also "an ideal dog" when it comes to allergies. Though he seems to sport an allergy to anything "cute."

Speaking of which, a large dog takes a keen interest in Squiggy. The two growl and Cotton later comments about the other owner's rudeness.

They were unable to attend the 2008 finals at the Sonoma-Marin Fair in Petaluma, as Cotton could not find an airline that would allow her to take the VIP in the passenger section for the six-hour flight. "I think that's too long to have him stuck in a kennel. I've got to be fair to him." But she still keeps things in perspective. "It's good publicity for the shelter." Winning dogs often appear on Jay Leno and David Letterman; Gus, a skin-cancered, three-legged and one-eyed wonder who won the June 20 competition, recently did an appearance on the Early Show on CBS. Squiggy was offered his own Animal Planet interview, had he been able to make the flight to California.

Cotton intends to enter the contest again: "If we won, I don't know, I don't think that's in the near future. Maybe a few years from now." Always next year, Squiggy.

e Matt Keefer swears he actually pet Squiggy. Don't worry, the ugly didn't rub off. Visit www.squiggydog.com to get your daily allowance of involuntary retching. Or get your voluntary help on at the Pet Refuge, 500 Stony Lane, North Kingstown, nkeapl.org.