

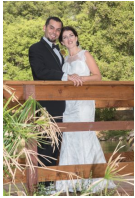
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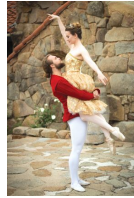
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Ramona Dog To Compete At Nationals



Photo courtesy of Purina® Pro Plan® Incredible Dog Challenge®

By Angela McLaughlin – Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Aug 11, 2016

Excitement reverberates through the air, through every strand of fur and hair, as dogs and their owners gear up for the Purina Pro Plan Incredible Dog Challenge Championship.

Residing in Ramona and preparing for this event is our very own champion. Saphira is a 2 ½ -year-old Belgian Malinois owned by longtime Ramona resident Melissa Ness. The pair recently broke the world record during the Fetch It competition at the Western Regionals held June 10 and 11 in Huntington Beach.

Though not originally invited to participate in the event, Ness and Saphira took a gamble and camped overnight as "walk-ons," hoping to be chosen as one of eight dogs allowed into the qualifiers — a pre-competition that would allow them into regionals.

Three out of eight dogs were chosen from the qualifiers, and Saphira was one of the lucky three. She went on to place first in the Western Regionals, initially tying the world record at 24 feet and then breaking it twice, at 24.6 feet and finally at 25 feet. Saphira's win will air on San Diego's XETV on Aug. 14 at 3 p.m.

Fetch It is an event where a bumper is held three feet over the water, and dogs run off the end of a dock and try to retrieve or knock down the bumper, which may be 20 or more feet from the end of the dock.

Winning the regionals granted Ness and Saphira an invite to the National Championship, to be held Oct. 1 at Purina Farms in Missouri. This is where winners of the Eastern and Western Regionals will assemble to compete for the national titles in a number of categories.

Ness has been training Saphira since she brought her home at eight weeks old. The amazing part is that they do not normally train with water; they do ground training, since they do not have their own training facility — though a recently purchased above-ground pool will change this.

"Her whole life has been gearing towards different types of sports," Ness says.

Saphira has practiced and competed in other water sports, such as dock jumping, also known as "Big Air," and Extreme Vertical. Among the three, they have been in about 10 competitions, and Ness says they are still very new to these events.

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Though they still compete in Big Air and Extreme Vertical, Ness says they chose to focus on Fetch It because, "It was something new and something different. I have a young dog that is willing to do anything I point her at."

Ness owns two other champion dogs: a nine year old Chesapeake Bay retriever, Smoke, who won Purina's Incredible Diving Dog event in 2010, and her 13-year-old dog Striker, a Belgian Malinois/border collie mix, who became a world champion in 2006 with Extreme Vertical. Ness has been training dogs for competitions since 2004, when she started with Striker.

She has dedicated a lot of time and energy toward her dogs, even buying her house and property for her dogs.

"I specifically wanted acreage and wanted to be able to train my dogs on my own property."

Ness says the perks of the events are not just about winning, but about the people.

"I like the people," she says. "I have friends in other countries because of dog sports. If I am traveling, I have friends everywhere now, and it's pretty cool."

She says that being a part of a community of dog lovers has made her truly enjoy being a part of these competitions.

"It's not about winning. It's about enjoying the time with my friends and enjoying the time with my dogs."

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