

THE “SITTING” BESWICK DALMATIAN

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There is a certain vendor at the Southeast all breed show clusters whose items-for-sale reveal strikingly discriminating taste. Most of his collectibles are truly one-of-a-kind antiques, and I always locate the booth's location by excited dog lovers spilling out from under the crowded canopy clutching their new acquisitions with triumphant smiles.

As years go by, the vendor tells me of various estates he learns of in order to bid on the deceased's lifetime Dalmatian acquisitions. And, indeed, his skillful buying is evident by the way his displays, compared to other vendors, are like diamonds in a field of coal. (Perhaps an appropriate metaphor, considering the prices he asks.) Beautifully matted-and-framed artwork, jewelry and *objets-des-art* crowd the shelves. A generous choice of various breeds' statues and figurines of bronze or porcelain or carved wood always are lined up often including the standing Dalmatians by fine china houses like Royal Doulton and Beswick. Those are discontinued Dalmatian items which constantly increase in collectible value. Sophisticated DCA members knew they were being removed from the product line and ran to deplete stock at local outlets while still at retail prices, such as the Royal Doulton standing Dalmatian and within recent years, the smaller of the two standing Beswicks.

The Doulton company acquired Beswick a number of years ago which may perhaps account for removing the competitive figurines at the time. Still, addicted Dalmatian collectors even purchase some Dalmatian collectibles if they represent an antique version of items still being merchandised brand new, similar to finding a first printing of a book currently at its tenth. Next time you're shopping, look for those Dalmatian fanciers who immediately turn the figurine upside down, searching for the identifying branding, unless you're occupied yourself turning everything upside down...or inside out, like your wallet.

I started out as an obsessed buyer, reaching for anything spotted. I purchased novelty items for the children in my family, and anything with whimsy or charm, personally. But I soon found myself narrowing to items which reflected Dalmatian history and heritage, such as prints and posters of the dogs coaching in Elizabethan England, although I sheepishly confess I recently brought home two sets of earthenware coffee mugs polka-dotted in black and brown.

For longtime Dalmatian collectors, the “sitting” Beswick has been an enticing acquisition and a friend returned from Crufts with one for me. It's perhaps one of the largest of our breed. It measures 14 inches high, 6 inches wide from hip-to-hip, and 10 inches deep from tail base-to-front paws. The actual Dalmatians used for the original artwork of the sitting Beswick came from the British Tollcross Kennels of Mary Greening, currently Chairman of the British Dalmatian Club and a prestigious Life Member of the Scottish Kennel Club. Mrs. Greening, a Scot, has been a distinguished Dalmatian breeder, fancier and BAER activist for decades. She has judged Dalmatians and West Highland White Terriers at Crufts and in the U.S. as well as in many foreign countries including Russia. She attended the DCA national specialty in Anaheim, California. She graciously shared with me her memories of how this coveted collectible came to be.

The Beswick sitting Dalmatian was the result of two of my bitches, Tollcross Tosca and Tollcross Tabitha, posing for the Beswick designer. At the time, our property adjoined that of Mr. Gilbert Beswick. An amusing coincidence was that we lived on the road to “Spot Acre.”

Mr. Beswick had shown me his original draft for the sitting Dalmatian. It was too heavy all over for a female so he asked if his designers could come to my home to do some sketches and drawings of my Dalmatians and, when they were completed, he asked if I would go over them for structure and type.

His designers arrived at our home soon after and spent several sessions with my two females. The bitches thought it was wonderful to be sat down and have this fuss being made of them. They were both used to being shown and they were in seventh heaven being allowed into the sitting room to be petted and preened over. On the other hand, the males in the establishment were not very amused at being kept out whilst the female spots had all the limelight.

The designers and I had a go-around! They wanted to use a male body structure without depicting all his male glory. According to them, that was too offensive for customers so we agreed it was to be a female with an appropriate head. I'm quite sure the designers thought I was off in the head department. I also insisted that we didn't want any fancy blue eyes or pinkish whiskers added by the girls on the production line who painted the castings before they proceeded into the kilns for firing.

They wanted to pretty them up, but I would not accept that.

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Surfing the Net using the term *Beswick* will provide innumerable U.S. dealers plus books written about the Beswick animals.

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