Features Editor Michele Buttelman
mbuttelman@the-signal.com

Lifestyle

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Pawing Her Way to the Top

■ Lassie's sister, Lulu the collie, is becoming a dog star in her own right.

By Michelle Sathe
Signal Staff Writer

She's got the flowing hair, the regal posture, the charisma, but Lulu isn't your stereotypical Hollywood bitch. The Valencia collie and 7-year-old sister of Lassie IX is a burgeoning celebrity in her own right. Her career includes a Ralph Lauren print campaign and television roles on hits like "Ghost Whisperer."

"When she sits up in the car seat, people will shout out and point, 'Lassie, Lassie.' She loves it. She's such an actress," said owner Coco d' Este.

Along with d' Este, also an actress, Lulu will be lending a paw to raise funds for animal awareness during the Mickey Spinatti's Show Stopper Stars Spectacular autograph convention Saturday and Sunday in North Hollywood.

D' Este will contribute proceeds from each $15 "PAWtograph" and photo sold to organizations dedicated to microchipping pets. It's a passion that became a calling after watching the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina.

"To see owners and pets separated like that was horrible. It happens in every day life, too. Collars and tags fall off, things happen. If pets are chipped, they can easily be scanned at the pound or a vet, they have a chance to be found," Este said.

Often referring to Lulu as her baby, Este became a proud parent seven years ago when she called Lassie owner and collie breeder Bob Weatherwax, who lived in Canyon Country at the time, in search of a puppy. Weatherwax said he just happened to have a 6-week-old collie litter from father Lassie VIII and mother Star. Would she be interested?

"I was like, yeah! Of course!," d' Este said with a big smile. "We went right over."

Lulu's star quality was apparent early, as d' Este illustrated.

"She was really calm, watching the chaos around her. She had a good solid energy, but very friendly, David said. 'That's the dog.'," d' Este said.

David would be Carradine, the "Kung Fu" star d' Este was married to for six years. During that time, d' Este put aside her career and acted as Carradine's manager, landing him the titular role in Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill." According to d' Este, Carradine's professional resurrection coincided with the demise of their marriage.

Now divorced, the multi-talented d' Este, a former journalist and public relations executive, is once again focusing on her own goals. She's featured on the syndicated "E! Hollywood Wives Tales" and created The Flying Goddess jewelry line, which is already a hit with d' Este's Hollywood connections, including Shirley MacLaine, Fran Drescher, and Maya Angelou.

Crafted in sterling silver and 18 karat rose gold and accented with a tiny diamond or pink sapphire, the goddess pendants, bracelets, and necklaces were inspired by d' Este's spiritual evolution following her painful divorce.

"Women are all goddesses, we are born that way. We have to remember our inner power that gives us wings to fly," she said.

D' Este started to notice Lulu's power during the dog's first public appearance at Disney's California Adventure premiere. While she had trained the dog herself, d' Este didn't know how she'd perform under the spotlight.

"There was a whole lot of press there and Lulu just walked the red carpet like a pro, looking at everyone like, 'I like this.' I thought maybe I should start putting her in stuff," d' Este said.

Next came a call to become a contestant in "The First Miss Dog Beauty Pageant." Lulu, Miss Arizona, didn't win the event, but was featured in three promotional spots for the show, including a memorable convertible cruise complete with sunglasses.

After a representation meeting with "A to Z Animals," Lulu was picked up for the 2005 Ralph Lauren Kids print campaign. While posing with a colt for the ads, Lulu proved to be more than just a pretty face.

"She was nose to nose with the horse, then he grabbed her tail. She just stood there and looked at him like, 'What are you doing?'," d' Este said.

Seems Lulu has a bit of Dr. Doolittle in her.

While getting ready for a walk, the dog encountered a squirrel on their stairway. D' Este watched in astonishment as Lulu went and touched noses with the squirrel for a few seconds before the rodent calmly retreated.

Lulu's even been known to groom the four cats she shares d' Este's home with.

Photo by MILA SAVIDOV/The Signal

(Above) Valencia's Lulu the collie, with owner Coco d' Este enjoy a moment in the park. The actress acquired Lulu from Bob Weatherwax, Lassie's owner, as an 8-week old puppy and taught her tricks herself. Lulu, who came from the same litter as Lassie IX, is descended from Lassie VIII and mother Star. (Right) Lulu, with owner Coco d' Este, will be signing "PAWtographs" Saturday and Sunday to raise funds for pet microchipping. The dog has been featured in a Ralph Lauren Kids print ad campaign and TV shows such as "Ghost Whisperer."

"She's amazing. She just gets along with everything and everybody," d' Este said. "She's especially sensitive with little children and the elderly."

As if on cue, on a warm day in Saugus' Central Park, Lulu goes over to kiss and play with a handicapped toddler slowly managing his way down a concrete path on a tiny walker.

In addition to public appearances and fundraising, d' Este and Lulu, at ARC Canine Good Citizen, are working toward a pet-therapy certification.

Otherwise, it's a typical, if not somewhat luxurious, dog's life for the famous collie.

Lulu eats a holistic diet of Sensible Choice kibble and Mother Hubbard snacks. She gets her long coat combed daily. When not traveling, she goes for walks and runs around Santa Clarita Valley's paseos.

At night, Lulu snuggles up to sleep with d' Este.

"She'll shove me out of the way and given me a grunt," d' Este said with a laugh familiar to any indulgent pet owner. "But I don't mind. She's my baby."

Meet Lulu the Collie and Coco d' Este at Mickey Spinatti's Show Stopper Stars Spectacular, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Saturday and 10 a.m.–4 p.m., Sunday, Beverly Garland's Holiday Inn, 4222 Vineland Blvd., North Hollywood. For more information on Lulu, visit www.luluphotcollie.com.