

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Oodles of poodles and ooh-la-la

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July 16, 2012 5:30 AM

For people attending the French Festival at Oak Park on Sunday, it was a tough decision to choose between watching the Poodle Parade or the other most popular show of the two-day festival - the Les Femmes Fatales Drag Revue Show. Both the Poodle Parade and the Femmes show occurred at the same time on two different stages, and were chosen by organizers due to their popularity as the grand finales of the festival, which is now in its 24th year.

Oodles of poodles, all different varieties, waited patiently with their owners for a chance to go on stage and be introduced to a crowd of about 200 people. In all, about 50 dogs participated, some coming from as far away as Portland to be a part of one of the French Festival's favorite traditions. Some poodles came dressed to impress while others just showed up immaculately groomed. Whatever the case, they seemed to enjoy checking each other out as well as the attention they got from the crowd. "This is his first parade. He is very intrigued and has a bunch of pretty ladies he has his eye on," said Kaia Stachel of Santa Barbara about her poodle Truman, who was dressed as Brigitte Bardot with a blonde wig for the parade.

"We thought it would be a fun, silly way to spend a Sunday," she said.

Lesley Lundgren from Glendale has brought her standard black poodle Gigi to participate in the parade for many years, but this time was the first year she put her in a costume. "We put her in French colors, which are also our colors and it is close to the Fourth of July. We are both very patriotic," said Ms. Lundgren with a laugh. "I wish I had a dollar for every picture someone has taken of my poodle. I would have made a lot of money."

Dave Clarke from Portland, Oregon, who actually drove down with his two poodles Antonio and Andre, also chose the patriotic theme. Mr. Clarke even went a step further by dyeing two strips of fur red and blue on his white poodle for the presentation. He was pleased with the event, although he joked that he would like to see it as a contest. "Would be great if there was a winner and you got a trip to Paris with your poodle," Mr. Clarke said with a laugh.

Teri Ball, the new executive director of the French Festival, said the beauty of the Poodle Parade is that it is not a contest but just great fun. "It's about people showing off their poodles and acting silly. It's puppy magic," said Ms. Ball.

It's the same reason the Poodle Parade is local Bill Martin's favorite part of the festival. "Where else do you see an English Bulldog and a cat enter the Poodle Parade? I like the spirit and the fun," said Mr. Martin.



That's right. There were some poodle party crashers. Karen Perkins of Santa Barbara brought three French Bulldogs to participate in the parade. "I decided they are more French than the poodles. Jellybean here thinks the poodles have very weird hairdos and doesn't want anything to do with them," joked Ms. Perkins. Ms. Ball admitted there were some "pretend poodles" in the parade but it made for a good show.



Meanwhile, about 500 people packed the Moulin Rouge stage area to watch seven performers from Les Femmes Fatales Drag Revue strut their stuff in stilettos, to music that had the audience clapping in sync.

The group, based in Santa Barbara, has been performing at the French Festival since 1998 and is usually a show stopper. "It's a high-energy show and is the best show at the festival. Great performances, great music and all French-based," said Darren Campbell of Santa Barbara. "It's a fantastic illusion. They embrace an alter ego and come across as such powerful women," he said.



Steve Hoegerman, who founded the festival 24 years ago, said the show is always a hit and the best way to end the festival. "If you look at the audience, everyone is grinning ear to ear. There is something fascinating about them. It's not just odd, it's entertaining and funny. They are truly comedians and it's a real show," said Mr. Hoegerman.



For the performers, entertaining the French Festival audience is a high point of the year. "There is no crowd like this. It's all ages, all types of people and they are just so supportive," said BellaDonna, one of the Les Femmes Fatales performers.

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FROM TOP :
Sporting festive hairdos, poodles Antonio, left, and Andre were on hand for the French Festival's Poodle Parade.

Ms. Kitty entertains the crowd with a Tina Turner song during the Femmes Fatales Drag Revue Show.

A large crowd enjoys a performance during the Femmes Fatales Drag Revue Show - NIK BLASKOVICH/NEWS-PRESS

Holden sits on display for the crowd in a beret and bandana.

Poodle owners Lillie Donner, left, with her dog Le Shicks, and Kaia Stachel and Becca Ellen with poodle Truman, display their canine friends at the Poodle Parade.

De Ja Ree entertains the crowd during the Femmes Fatale Drag Revue. NIK BLASKOVICH / NEWS-PRESS

