

Barkus dogs steal hearts as they parade through French Quarter

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By Laura Testino, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

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Science should hurry up and advance for the sake of allowing dogs to communicate with people as they parade in Barkus.

What the heck do the streets of the French Quarter smell like? Do you like this brass music? Are Milk Bone throws the best things ever or just okay? Why aren't you trying to take off your costume?

This is just the beginning of a very long list of questions we have for these pups on parade.

Barkus rolled through the French Quarter on Sunday (Feb. 24), with the theme "Big Bark Theory: Barkus Goes to Comic Con" as if dog people celebrating their dogs needed something else to geek out about. (See: fluffy white Samoyed dog named Yoshi dressed in Yoshi costume with parents as Mario and Luigi.)



Yoshi, poses as Yoshi with his parents as Mario and Luigi in Louis Armstrong Park for Barkus on Sunday, Feb. 24.

At the pre-“pawty” In Louis Armstrong Park before the parade, Barkus Princess Royale Innocence, a black Labrador retriever, and her human Malcolm Alexander were waiting in the VIP tent before lining up with the floats.

Alexander was released from prison in January 2018 after spending nearly 38 years behind bars for a crime he didn’t commit. He began to care for Innocence, nicknamed Inn, who was born on the prison grounds to another pup. He and Inn were having a wonderful time, he said. Alexander couldn’t believe how many genuine animal lovers were out for the parade.

“The thing about animals, they reflect their owners,” Alexander said.

For one pair of Princess Leias, that was particularly and literally true. Grand Duchess Velvet, a Chow Chow rescue, matched costumes with her human mom Lori Turoff, whose husband Howard was dressed as Obi-Wan Kenobi.



Lori Turoff and pup Grand Duchess Velvet dress as Princess Leia for Barkus 2019.

The Turoffs came to New Orleans for their first Mardi Gras in 2001, and stumbled across Barkus at Armstrong Park. Howard estimated about 200 dogs and 2,000 people were in attendance that year. Their Chow Chow rescue Sempai was 1 year old then, and they swore to bring him back.

At age 9, Sempai was given just a few months to live. “If he survives this surgery, we can’t put this off any more,” Howard remembers telling Lori. Sempai made it, and in 2012 was a Barkus duke. Howard said he remembers attendance was in the hundreds of thousands. He couldn’t believe it.

“It was the best day of my life,” Howard said, beginning to tear up. Sempai died in the summer of 2013, and the next October, they adopted Velvet. She’s been a duchess in the parade ever since.

“That was our first one in 2012, and we haven’t missed one since,” Howard said. “And I don’t plan to.”



Howard and Lori Turoff's dog, Sempai, was a duke in Barkus in 2012 and 2013.

Barkus festivities began before parade day, but really geared up over the weekend. King Stanley James Louis Preston Foxworth and Queen Bristol started their Friday dining at Galatoire's. It may have gone to Stanley's head a bit, his mom Tracy Foxworth said.

"We almost expected him to do this at one point," she said, daintily waving one slightly cupped hand while lightly surveying the crowd. Then she and Stanley were off, ready to set up in the parade's first float, a pushed carriage with a giant king crown.

Kelly Phillips, who attracted national attention for sailing down the Mississippi after receiving a cancer diagnosis, rode with his first-mate Sapphire, who was a duchess on the court.

The court member who drew the most attention was Hank, the "Hambassador." Viewers crowded into the street, gasping and taking photos with their phones of Hank, who was riding in a pet stroller.



Hank the Pig rolls by as the Mystic Krewe of Barkus puts paws to pavement to parade through the French Quarter with the theme "The Big Bark Theory: Barkus Goes to Comic Con" on Sunday, February 24, 2019. (Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune)

It took about another hour for the yellow, green and then purple groups to pass. The Zollinger family went as clowns wearing referee shirts, and their dog, a Havanese named Tootsie Roll, wore a yellow penalty flag-inspired clown collar.

One impressive mini wagon float belonged to Toby Meaux and his 11-year-old, three-and-a-half-pound Chihuahua, Bailey. Following a "Frozen" theme, Meaux dressed as Kristoff and Bailey wore an Elsa costume. Anna, Olaf and Sven stuffed figures rode at the front of the snowy-looking wagon.



Toby Meaux's Chihuahua Bailey is dressed as Elsa on a "Frozen" themed float for Barkus 2019.

Adoptable dogs brought up the rear, ready for any attendees who realized they were missing a furry pal after witnessing all the other dressed-up, goofy, tongue-lolling Barkus pups.

There were a few-too-many scary skateboards and hockey sticks for furry reporting companion Rita June, though this reporter's blue heeler mix would have plenty to say. Other than the busy distractions, there wasn't much else to complain about. The weather was clear, sunny and in the 60s (varying from shade to sun), and the asphalt didn't begin to warm up until close to 3:30 p.m., and never got hot.

Rita saw some photos of the parade, and gave this reporter two kisses on the face before mashing her own addition -- "vbc" -- into the laptop keyboard. "Very beautiful creatures," perhaps? It would indeed be accurate.