

Is Your Dog Spoiled?

Huddled under my umbrella the other day, I was dodging raindrops and puddles as I walked the three blocks from the parking garage to my office. As I was passing an apartment building, I saw an elderly woman standing near the entrance holding an umbrella over her little white poodle dog. Unfortunately, the umbrella wasn't large enough to cover both her and the dog, so she was getting soaked. Unable to withhold comment, I said, "Do you think he'll melt if he gets wet?" She responded, "Well, he's sweet enough to melt, but the truth is that if I don't hold the umbrella for him he gets angry and pouts and won't eat his lunch." And, by dinner time he's an absolute bear! Welcome to the world of the pampered pet.

Although man's best friend has always been his dog, the degree to which man has rewarded that friendship has quite possibly gotten out of hand. Evidence to support that statement can be found in the food we give our pets, the "attire" we put on their backs, the jewelry with which we adorn them, the amenities we provide in their surroundings and the provisions we make for their temporary care when we absolutely have to leave them behind. If necessary, we send "Rover" to counseling sessions with dog psychologists, provide outrageously expensive dental care, clip/wash/curl their hair and make sure their nails are done so as not to embarrass them in front of their friends.

How many of us have spent a restless night because "Missy", our pug faced Pekinese, can't seem to get comfortable in our bed or "Bull", our six ounce Chihuahua, growls and snaps at us when we roll over on him. Yes, for those of you that are disbelievers, many people do share their beds with their doggies. In fact, I've heard of many cases where couples sleep apart rather than crowd the dog. Have you ever tried to argue with a sleepy Doberman Pincher? Forget about it!

A thriving and lucrative industry has grown up around the pampered pet. Pet owners spend multi-millions each year on their little four-legged friends. Occasionally the news media will offer a blurb about the pet owner who spent hundreds, even thousands of dollars on a diamond studded dog collar for "Fluffy." However, this phenomenon is actually rather commonplace. Pick up the "Yellow Pages" in any city and you'll find scads of pet salons that offer expensive pet jewelry and accessories. And just because you've gone to the expense of buying that ruby red sweater, with matching rubies, for "Fifi", don't think your obligation have been fulfilled. If "Fifi" can't have a gold rimmed feeding bowl, like her friends have, she'll no doubt have to double up on her counseling sessions. The expense of this could easily exceed the cost of the bowl.

Now let's get down to diet – what can we feed "Prince", the proud Rottweiler? To be honest, Prince isn't all that fond of dry dog food. He'll eat some of it, but only if mixed with some of that delicious lamb gravy he likes. And, just like most of us, he prefers light fare in the mornings; perhaps a few scrambled eggs and just a slice or two of bacon. Careful not to overfeed though; he likes his lunch of broiled liver at precisely 12 noon. No need to

make a big fuss about dinner though, he'll usually eat some (or most) of whatever it is that you're having.

This scenario might involve a slight stretch, but it is certainly not too far fetched. We worry more about what our pets will eat, or if they're "off their feed", than we worry about what our kids eat. I wonder how it is we know that our kids will eat when they get hungry, but we can't accept that this truism might apply to our dogs too. We feel compelled to continue to offer our dogs a full menu from which to select and if all else fails, it's time to schedule a trip to the Vet.

Speaking of Veterinarians - most of them now offer direct deposit so your entire paycheck can be directed right into their accounts. Veterinary expenses have gone through the roof and there's no end to the elaborate medical procedures now being provided routinely. A friend who bellyached for months about the cost of dental appliances (braces) for his kid willingly shelled out \$2500 to fix his dog's overbite because "Tiger" appeared to be in discomfort when chewing on his rawhide bone.

Now that we've clearly established that we spoil our dogs, let's offer a word or two in our own defense. Dogs love us without reservation. Scold them, treat them meanly, tease them, leave them for long periods of time or forget to feed them and they'll still love you and want nothing more than to be near you. Throughout history, dogs have given their lives for their masters. "Police" dogs will face an armed attacker to protect their handler and "Seeing Eye" dogs will risk death or injury to steer their Charge away from a speeding car. A dog's love for its master is pure and unquestioning. In my opinion, they deserve all the pampering they can get.

Pets make us feel good. They comfort us, allow us to be ourselves and give those of us that need it, a reason for living.

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