

Dogs are people too € so it goes

by Jason_Love

My mom has a poodle named Max. Mad Max. She pampers him in a way that I don't recall being pampered as a child. The dog eats off her plate, sleeps in her bed, and advises her on life decisions.

When my mom leaves home, she turns on the television to comfort the dog. You've done that? Have you checked the TV Guide beforehand?

This year Americans will spend \$34 billion on pet products according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, which is planning to overthrow the White House. From designer collars to gourmet rawhide, this market is booming for demented dog-owners like my mom.

A handful of companies were good enough to send samples, which we decided to test on unsuspecting pooches. First stop: the local dog park, an urban oasis that spans 3.5 grassy acres and makes you just want to relieve yourself.

The park is divided into sections, one for the big dogs and one for dogs that weigh less than 30 pounds (or, as the other dogs call them, "Ankle-Biters"). We tried the big dogs, where there was more action. Pointers were pointing, retrievers were retrieving, schnauzers were schnauzing. It was the social event of the season.

Dogs aren't dumb, either. They know that once they unload, it's time to go home. I saw a collie sniffing the fence with a pained expression "To pee, or not to pee. That is the question."

Good thing we found Quincy, who was more like a runny faucet. Quincy is part bichon frise and part poodle, what they call a bichapoo (or, on bad days, biACHapoo). Quincy's leader, Susan Hechtal, agreed to sample our first product, Poop-Freeze (www.poop-freeze.com).

Poop-Freeze is an aerosol spray that hardens dogdoo for easy pick-up, and if you ask me, it is this kind of forward thinking that put a man on the moon.

Quincy produced for us almost instantly, and Susan descended on the project like a firefighter, dousing the pile with Poop-Freeze. She got so excited that she used half a can.

“It takes a lot,” she said.

Who was I to argue.

When Susan finished, Quincy's business looked like a flocked Christmas tree. She shook her head in amazement as she picked up the disposable, environment-friendly fecal rock.

“This is a great, great product,” said Susan. “I'm definitely going to buy some.”

Others seem to feel the same. Poop-Freeze is one of the hottest products in the pet store, selling out on shelves across the U.S. (except, for some reason, in Alaska).

The makers claim that Poop-Freeze is "non-flammable, contains no CFCs, and is perfect for indoor and outdoor use." Of course, if you have to use it indoors, you might want to try a product that I am developing. It is called Dog Thumper, and is similar to the newspaper you are holding, only rolled up.

Next there was Coby, a red-nosed pit bull whose coat was so rich you could shear him for silk. Coby, five months old, had just discovered digging and was halfway to China when we found him. Owner Mark Ellen agreed to throw him a Babble Ball [www.petqwerks.com].

Babble Balls are battery-powered fetch toys that make over 12,000 disturbing noises. One makes animal sounds so that your dog thinks there are animals trapped inside, completely twisting your pet's worldview. Models include Minnie Doggy, Bull Doggy, Blinky, and Kitty.

I, of course, was drawn to Windy, which produces fart noises "according to the package, an exquisite collection of diverse, high-quality rippers."

Now how do you find experts on that? "No, I give that one a seven. Entirely too much vibrato."

Coby nudged the Babble Ball and, upon hearing it â€œtalk,â€• began to yelp madly. Abby the Dalmatian and Rocko the Labradoodle came over to investigate, and before long the pack was pawing this strange object that would, in its defense, fart back. You really had to be there.

For those of you who think this product is in poor taste, please note that Windy does periodically say, â€œExcuse me.â€• Unfortunately, Babble Balls are motion-sensitive and go off when you so much as think too loud, which may, in time, cause insanity.

Since youâ€™re already grossed out, weâ€™ll do Tushee Wipes (www.invet.com). Tushee Wipes are moist towelettes that clean your dogâ€™s rear end and are, for my money, the best thing to ever happen to dingleberries. Tushee Wipes are lanolin-free, ph-balanced, and, unlike the Babble Ball, non-irritating.

You remember Susan, the intrepid poop freezer? She agreed to audition the Tushee Wipe on poor old Quincy. Quincy had just used the bathroomâ€”againâ€”so the timing was right. Susan calls it â€œpoopsingâ€• to take the edge off. Makes it sound like an innocent mistake.

Susan lifted Quincyâ€™s tail and went right at it. Quincy, who seemed accustomed to this sort of thing, assumed a debonair expression that said, â€œExcuse me, but do you happen to have some Grey Poupon?â€• Of course, in this case we might say Grey Poopoff.

Tushee Wipes can also be used to de-slobber Babble Balls and to remove poopsy from the shoes of angry newspaper photographers. So it goes.

Next we inspected Live-a-Little pet treats (www.halopets.com), which contain no preservatives, no fillers, no dyes, and no by-products. In other words, your pet will eat better than you do. The nuggets have the consistency of bark but taste like chicken.

We found a volunteer in Dozer, a bull mastiff who is only four months old but can tell you that Live-a-Littles are a greater invention than birth. He got so excited that he wet everyone in the first two rows. The other dogs, noticing this, joined the foray until I, in desperation, had to dump the treats on the ground. It was a doggy piñata party.

Halo created Live-a-Littles to combat the cruelty found in dog food. “By-products” may sound digestible but refer to components in brake fluid, weed killer, fecal matter, and other items slightly less wholesome than road kill.

As much fun as we were having, it was time to pack up the tent and head to the beach. Where else would we test a neon pink dog bikini from Cocomojor Hawaii (www.cocomojorhawaii.com)? This smart polyester and cotton one-piece comes in a flirty floral pattern and makes beachwear anything but basic.

We found Stan Markol walking “Little Squirt,” a six-pound male terrier that can’t see through his own bangs. In human years, Little Squirt is 42, the perfect age for a midlife crisis that would involve cross-dressing.

Stan held Little Squirt’s legs, and I assured him “the dog” that it would be okay. As we struggled with the project, an onlooker, Steve McKeaney, offered these words of encouragement: “I hope he bites you both.”

But Little Squirt warmed to the task. Once fitted, he strutted by like a dog on the catwalk. He was comfortable with the picture-taking and lacked only a pair of Elton John sunglasses.

“You know what he’s having for dinner tonight?” said Stan. “London broil.”

It would take a lot of London broil to make up for this day.

Our final product, the Triple-Pet toothbrush (www.benedent.com), was a tougher sell. You thought it was hard getting children to brush their teeth; try the dog.

I had no choice but to demonstrate. Applying Benedent’s syrupy toothpaste to its tri-angle toothbrush, I cleaned my teeth doggy style. And you know what? It worked great! Without even bending your wrist, you hit every crevice at once. It concerned me that pet product technology has surpassed our own.

Inspired by my exhibition, Barbara Castro “no relation to the oppressive dictator” agreed to brush the teeth of Shawnees, her shitzu. At first the dog wriggled in horror but then gradually yielded to the oppression. By the end Shawnee was leaning in to it.

“Dog breath be gone!” said Barbara.

This product also has a practical slant. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs suffer periodontal disease by age three. Signs include bleeding gums, yellow teeth, canker sores, and bad breath—the same symptoms that have plagued Great Britain for years.

And there you have it. Just when you thought you had seen it all, we find six new products to prove that there is indeed no end to the madness. In today's pet store you will find edible greeting cards, Halloween costumes, crystal amulets, Kosher snacks, and a complete Barbie collection of outdoor accessories FOR YOUR DOG.

I expect that someday canines will take over altogether. We will find them driving to work with their heads out the window, barking orders at the rest of us. After work, they'll get soused at the local pub and give a new meaning to "bar stool."

The rule seems to be this: whatever comforts you enjoy as a human being, somewhere there's a dog enjoying the same comfort with more advanced technology. And if anyone ever asks what animal you'd be if you could return to earth, I think the answer is clear. It's a dog's life indeed.

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