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February 25, 2007

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### Expo unveils hottest pet products

Dog strollers, seat belts, self-cleaning litter boxes part of the fun

BY AUTUMN PHELPS FLORIDA TODAY

ORLANDO -- If all dogs really do go to heaven, their final resting place would probably involve lots of tasty treats, squeaky toys and mailmen to chase, among other doggie favorites. But nowadays, a pooch's paradise is not far from Earth.

Today, pet owners can buy just about any toy, goody or gadget that suits their furry friend's fancy -- excluding the mailman, of course. Nothing demonstrates this better than the Global Pet Expo, an annual pet industry trade show this weekend at the Orange County Convention Center. Closed to the public, the event offered pet merchandise buyers the chance to explore all kinds of pet products, from the best-tasting treats to self-cleaning litter boxes.

#### Celebrity guests

Who better to promote the pet pampering industry than America's favorite Collie, Lassie? Timmy's best pal made an appearance at the expo as the official spokesdog for Lassie Natural Way's line of all-natural ingredients dog food. With her was veterinarian and "pet parenting specialist" Jeff Werber, host of a new American Public Television series "Lassie's Pet Vet."

"When you think about it, Lassie really started the whole trend of people bonding with their pets," said Werber, whose show will feature stories about people and their dogs "growing from each other."

If there's any story that sums up the power of the person-pet relationship, it's that of Faith, another canine celebrity guest at the Global Pet Expo. Faith is a mutt born with only two legs. When many people would have put her down, owner Jude Stringfellow gave the deformed pup a chance.

"At first, we taught her to hop like a rabbit," Stringfellow said. "We named her Faith because she could do it on her own."

After lots of training and determination on

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someday they might put cool stuff like this in the paper before it happens....no it's florida today...but wait there stupid dog was there so they did know!!!!!!

Posted by: **cpionutz2000** on Sun Feb 25, 2007 1:21 pm

the event wasn't open to the public. at least that's what the story said -- in the second paragraph.

I'm all for getting on the newspaper's case for doing stupid things --- like, for instance, writing every other day (it seems) about pet gadgets, pet cancer, pet toys, fat pets, how to talk to your pet, pet psychologists, dressing your pet in funny clothes (and sending in a picture, of course), cute pet names, the latest take on cats versus dogs as the "ideal" pet, etcetera etcetera etcetera . . . --- but I usually force myself read the drivel before posting.

And if I ... really ... just ... can't ... stand ... to ... read ... the drivel, I just don't post.

Call it a pet peeve of mine.

Posted by: **sprintr50** on Sun Feb 25, 2007 5:20 pm

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Nice shades. FLORIDA TODAY's official dog reporter, Gracie, tries on a pair of Doggies at the Global Pet Expo at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. They are 100 percent UV protective sunglasses made especially for dogs. Chris Kridler, FLORIDA TODAY

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Capt. Hiram's Great Food

Capt. Hiram's

Stringfellow's part, Faith is 4 and walks around on her hind legs with minimal challenges. She's become an inspiration for many people born with disabilities and injured veterans, Springfellow said, and has shared her success on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and "The Montell Williams Show."

Faith was hired to "represent" Ethical Pets, one of the many pet product manufacturers at the expo.

### A growing industry

Famous pets, without a doubt, receive special treatment and attention, but they aren't the only ones. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, people are spending more on pet services and products. Last year, consumers spent \$38.5 billion. This year the tally is expected to top \$40 billion.

The APPMA says the reason for such an increase is not only because people are adopting more pets, but also because they are treating them more like members of the family. Health products such as special foods, sports drinks and supplements are big trends in the industry.

Safety also is a major concern of pet owners, and many are buying devices such as the Tru-Fit Smart Harness, a seatbelt for dogs. For people who don't want to lose their dog in the dark, Lisa Speroni invented a glow-in-the-dark pet ID collar.

"It's activated by body heat," Speroni said about the rubbery collar. "One size fits every animal."

And when venturing out for a walk, don't forget to arm the pooch with Doggles, 100 percent UV protective sunglasses made especially for dogs. Good luck trying to keep them on, though.

Cat lovers can keep their kitties safe, too. The Cat's Den pet enclosures keep feline friends from running in front of cars with tunnel-like cages that can lead outdoors. The Cat's Den allows cats to see "the best of both worlds," without the worry of them running away, the manufacturer says.

Convenience was another common theme at the Global Pet Expo. Pool Pup makes steps for dogs to climb out of swimming pools with ease. The Bamboo Feed & Toss food bowls make dinnertime a breeze by eliminating the cleaning process. Whether they're the best way to save the environment is another story, but at least the plastic bowls are recyclable.

For fish lovers, the biOrb fish bowl likely was the most convenient (and attractive) pet accessory. The makers of the globes say they are self-cleaning.

### Bowwow bling

Pork Chomps, a new brand of dog treats, had one of the most elaborate displays, the Pork Chomp Palace. Pet owners and their dogs at the expo got the royal treatment.

FLORIDA TODAY's official dog reporter, Gracie, already was dressed to impress at the Global Pet Expo with her "Press" T-shirt. But the expo offered bejeweled and custom clothing for furry critters, a popular choice for people wanting to spoil their pets. After all, a bowwow with "bling" can put a smile on almost anyone's face.

**Contact Phelps at 242-3612 or [aphelps@floridatoday.com](mailto:aphelps@floridatoday.com).**

### WEB EXTRAS

#### Dog reporter explores Pet Expo

#### Pet facts

According to a study by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association:

- In 2007, total American spending on pets is projected to be \$40.8 billion.
- Total pet spending in 2006 was \$38.5 billion, an increase from \$21 billion in 1996
- Of the \$38.5 billion spent in 2006, \$15.4 billion was spent on food, \$9.3 billion on supplies, \$9.2 billion on veterinary care, \$1.9 billion on live animal purchases, and \$2.7 billion on other services.
- Pet health is the most powerful trend in the industry.
- Pet insurance, veterinary care and pharmaceuticals also are strong trends.
- Retail industry leaders such as Petsmart and Petco are reporting double-digit growth in services such as training and grooming.



**Celebrity pups.** Faith, a two-legged dog who walks like a human, left, and Lassie made appearances at the Global Pet Expo in Orlando last week. Chris Kridler, FLORIDA TODAY

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