

# poaches nestle in lap of luxury

\$34 billion a year lavished on food, vet bills, even hair dye

By Mindy Fetterman  
USA TODAY

You have a dog. You love your dog. So you buy good dog food, a special formula if he's an older dog or a little dog, or low-carb if he's chubby, or an organic, vitamin-enriched food if you're into a holistic lifestyle.

You buy a new collar every six months: a bright green one for spring and one with reindeer for Christmas. You buy matching leashes.

You have a dog bed that's not a left-over bathmat. It might have your dog's name embroidered on it. You buy toys and special bones that clean his teeth. You brush his teeth. You might have his picture taken by a professional photographer or painted by an artist.

You have a dog walker. You have a favorite kennel, maybe even one that's a "resort,"



By Tommie Pinn, USA TODAY

where dogs lie around on couches and watch TV. OK, maybe that's a bit much. But you'd do it if you could afford it.

When your dog gets sick, you'll pay almost anything to be sure he gets better, including chemotherapy for cancer and hip replacement surgery. You like to take your dog on vacation, and you'll sneak him up the back stairs to the hotel room if they don't allow dogs.

You'd bring your dog to work, too, if they'd let you.

Join the crowd. America has always loved its dogs. But now, you could argue, our obsession is becoming truly obsessive.

In the past 10 years, the pet industry has doubled in size to \$34 billion a year in revenue.

See COVER STORY next page >

## Cover story

## Coming Monday

Preview the top dogs at Westminster in Sports

# How much is that doggy bed in the window? \$4,000, with dresser

Continued from 1A

enue. That includes everything from pet foods and toys to furniture and paying fees for dog walkers, groomers, even pet therapists.

The fastest-growing part of the pet industry is super-high-end luxury items, such as the \$5,500 Swarovski crystal doggie vest that is the most expensive item featured so far in *New York Dog*, a new magazine for that city's dog lovers.

"It's not just Milk-Bones anymore," says Leslie Padgett, editor-in-chief.

Nowhere is this more evident than at the 160 dog shows held around the country every year.

And in particular in New York this weekend, as 2,500 dogs and their owners gather for the 129th annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. About 36,000 show up to watch in person, while about 4 million watch it on TV. Many consider these dogs the nation's most pampered pooches.

Wags call the contest the "sport of grooming."

## Who's your baby?

Yet, the Best in Show at Westminster might not really be the most spoiled dog in America. That title might be held by the dog in your house.

Or, maybe in Dana Ujobag's house in Union Beach, N.J. She spends so much on her Boston terrier, Sophie, that she's embarrassed to tell her boyfriend.

"She's one spoiled prima donna," Ujobag says. "I don't even look at the price tags. I just say, 'Oh! This would be cute on her.'"

She will admit that her Web site, pawpalaceonline.com, which sells upscale dog clothes, collars and furniture — including a \$4,000 bed with matching dresser — is doing great. "Some people don't blink an eye to buy something like that," she says.

Cece Cord of New York City was "horrified" when a friend gave her a miniature Yorkshire terrier after her faithful Labrador died a few years ago. "She looked like a hamster!" she says.

But now, Tiger travels with her everywhere and has inspired Travels with Tiger, her business in high-end luxury goods for dogs, including a \$5,700 green crocodile leather travel bag, sold at Bergdorf Goodman on Fifth Avenue in New York. You can buy the matching human purse, too. "It's like playing grown-up Barbie dolls," she says of the little sweaters with fur trim (\$295) and other clothes for dogs that she features.

Dog grooming, too, has evolved beyond the occasional flea bath. Padgett reports that dog owners are doing plastic surgery on their dogs and dying their hair when it gets gray. "It's like owners project themselves onto their dogs, and they don't want to look old," she says.

## Pet insurance: an employee benefit

Owners are spending tens of thousands of dollars on their dog's veterinary care, too, including kidney transplants and MRIs.

"We've seen invoices that run from \$10,000 to \$30,000 to treat a variety of conditions," says Peter Weinstein, medical director for Veterinary Pet Insurance in Brea, Calif. The company has sold more than 160,000 pet insurance policies, vs. 157,000 in 2000. And about 1,100 U.S. companies offer VPI's pet insurance as an employee benefit.

"You can't question it, because people need these relationships with their pets," he says. "We know that dogs give unconditional love, they don't go to college, and they never complain. Why not love them? They're better than kids!" he laughs. Of course, he's kidding, but he realizes that his golden retriever, Sundance, is "the most important thing" in his two kids' lives.

The popularity of tiny dogs is growing, spurred by female celebrities who are photographed carrying their Yorkies or Pekingese or Chihuahuas in their handbags, says Padgett, who has a "smart alecky" yellow Labrador retriever named Buck who "runs sideways" when he fetches a ball.

Trends such as later childbirth for married couples, later marriage for singles and more empty nesters with no kids at home are feeding the dog craze, says Bob Vetere, chief operating officer of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

"While the U.S. economy has suffered these last couple of years, the pet industry has not mirrored it," Vetere says. "As Americans have felt more insecure and less sure of the world around them, they're turning to pets for solace."

Vetere has a golden retriever named Dakota who's "a hoot!" he says. "If someone did a lobotomy on him, they'd find a tennis ball. That's all he cares about."

## Four-footed people

The latest trend is for companies that make products for humans to expand into the canine world. "We're seeing the humanization of pets," says Vetere.

OPI, the mainstay of manicurists, has a line of nail polish for dogs. Hasbro makes dog toys. And motorcycle maker Harley-Davidson offers a little leather jacket for dogs.

Two years ago, John Paul DeJoria, the chairman and CEO of Paul Mitchell Systems — the nation's largest privately owned hair-care firm — and some partners launched a line of pet-grooming products that are "tested on humans, so it's safe for your pet."

That human is John Paul himself, who says he's tested every product they sell.

"I even tested the flea and tick shampoo, even though I don't have fleas or ticks," he laughs. You can get "calming moisturizing shampoo" with chamomile and sweet almond oil extracts (\$7.99 for a 16-ounce bottle). Or shampoo with natural Australian tea tree oil to control ticks and fleas without chemicals (\$9.99 for a 16-ounce bottle). The company's revenue is "in the millions," he says.

Products also are tested for smell by "the coolest dog in the world" — his golden retriever, Jack. "Jack will sniff them," says DeJoria. "If he walks away, that scent is canned."

## Working like a dog

On June 24, Pet Sitters International will sponsor its seventh annual Take Your Dog To Work Day. Seven years ago, 300 companies participated. Last year, more than 10,000 did.

"The purpose is to celebrate what great companions dogs make in the workplace," says John Long, spokesman for the association, which has nearly 7,000 members worldwide. "They boost morale and productivity and even sales." The goal, though, is to encourage employees to adopt a dog from a shelter and "get the word out" that dogs are great. Long doesn't have a dog, yet. He's in the process of moving and needs space, because, "I'm a Doberman kind of guy."

If we can't take them to work, we hire pet walkers. Laura Vorreyer, 36, makes "six figures, easy," walking dogs in Santa Monica, Calif. "No one raises their hand in the fifth grade and says, 'I want to be a dog walker.' But I can make a good living out here doing this. And I love dogs." She doesn't have one, though. She says she *was* engaged during the day.

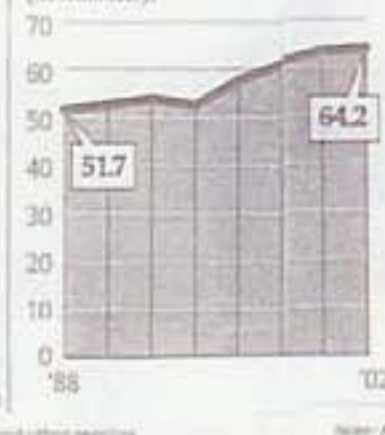
## Pet industry market grows

Americans are spending more on their pets, especially in luxury categories such as clothes, grooming and specialty foods (in billions).



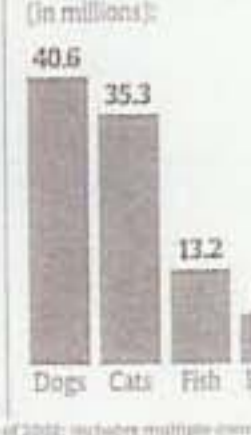
## Pet ownership rises

Number of households owning pets (in millions):



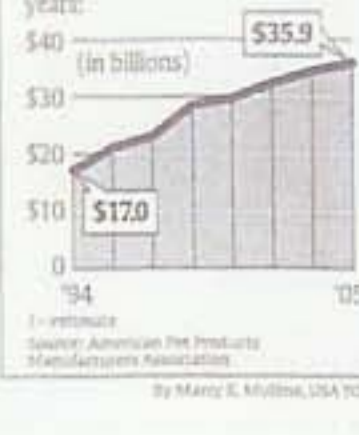
## Dogs, cats rule

Top four pet choices by number of households (in millions):



## More spent on pets

The amount Americans spend on pets has doubled in the past 10 years:



## Pet boutique

Photo gallery: See the latest luxury goods for Fido at sports.usatoday.com. Meet Dave Helming, co-owner of the 2004 Westminster champion.



By Dan MacKinnon, USA TODAY

.com tell travelers where they can take their dogs along. La Quinta has 300 "dog-friendly" hotels. Some high-end hotels are welcoming dogs the high-end way. The W Hotel in New York offers turndown service including a monogrammed pillow.

Many Ritz-Carltons offer everything from bone-shaped dog pillows and personalized tags to sitters and treats. The policy is "directly in proportion to how many celebrities visit the hotels," says spokeswoman Vivian Deuschl, who interrupts a conversation to greet Bailey, her black Labrador, who promptly lies down at her feet.

Hotels in New York, Boston, San Francisco, Washington and South Beach in Miami are very welcoming to dogs. At the Central Park South Ritz in New York, "you can borrow a Burberry raincoat for your little dog," says Deuschl. The Ritz in Bachelor Gulch, Colo., has a resident yellow Lab, Bachelor, who's available to be walked, petted and taken on hikes by hotel guests.

At the Ritz-Carlton, Georgetown, in Washington, you can come for a "Tails in the City" weekend that offers your dog a chef-prepared menu and a manicure. Once a month, the hotel holds a "Muttini" hour where you

**Daily constitutional:** Pet walker Laura Vorreyer takes Labradors Norman and Millie for a walk along the beach in Santa Monica, Calif.

can have a drink while your pooch gets a pet massage or pet aroma-therapy services. All this pampering, while fun for the dogs and their owners, might seem a little over-the-top to the more practical minded. "To be honest with you, I don't know if anyone really needs a diamond-studded collar for their dog," says Vetere of the pet manufacturers group. That might be true, says magazine editor Padgett, but dogs give back more than they take. "You can always buy a great purse," she says. "But does it give you a lick on the face at the end of the day?"

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