

My Search For the Perfect Dog

I had decided a couple months ago to do an article on min pin feet. There is a saying in the horse community that “the foot makes the horse”. This is also true in dogs. Often with horses, a good blacksmith can correct a faulty gait by trimming the hoof and changing the angle of the hoof to affect the way a horse moves. On dogs there is no hoof to trim, but you can cripple a dog by not keeping its nails trimmed. I see this quite often with pet owners of all breeds. Most dog show people know that nail trimming is a constant fact of life, and if WE find it to be a chore, it is even more daunting for the average pet person who has that “fear” of the nail clippers. And most of them do not even know about using a grinder. Nails that are not kept trimmed can and will damage a dog’s feet and quite literally cripple them especially if they are overweight. I CRINGE in pain when I see someone walking a dog down the street and the dog is limping and it’s nails are overgrown and turning sideways. That dog is in excruciating and constant pain and certainly cannot get any footing in the house if they are not on carpet. Going up and down stairs is pure torture. Try growing your fingernails long and then continuously tapping them on a hard surface for hours and hours every day for many months. In my mind this a form of animal cruelty. Like having a constant toothache in your foot that you cannot escape. And domesticated animals rely on their owners for this important foot maintenance.

Even with my modest number of 8 min pins, and 3 birds (one large Cockatoo, and African Grey parrot and a canary), I cringe at doing nails. (Ok..the canary is a piece of cake). But the parrots require a team effort – they do have beaks! And you cannot reason with them like you can a dog.

The breed standard for min pins states the Miniature Pinscher should have “Feet small, catlike, toes strong, well arched and closely knit with deep pads. Nails thick, blunt.” I’m good with all of that until we get to the “thick, blunt” part. Keeping them that way requires diligence on a regular basis. And I drill that into my pet customers even if it means they bring the dog to me on a regular basis. It’s a free service for my former puppies.

Here’s where I am convinced that all dogs are related to Lobsters and other species with claws. Stop shaking your head and think about it. Where else would those middle 2 nails on the front foot of every dog come from? They grow 10 times faster than any other toenail on any other foot. In the blink of an eye, they can get long enough that you could hang a dog on a clothesline by its front toes, like a sloth. Genetically, for me, the Perfect Dog would be bred to have short toenails.

All I have to do is THINK about bringing out the nail clippers and I can’t find a dog in my house, not even if I ask, “Who wants a cookie?” Except for Robin, who is so consumed by her desire for cookies that she even volunteers to get her nails done over and over instead of the other dogs, if she also gets THEIR cookies. She is also the dog that for years when I did nails on the grooming table, had to be boxed in with huge laundry soap bottles to keep her front end pointing in one direction. Now I just pull them into my lap to do them. Three dogs vaporize into thin air, one lays in the wading pool convinced if she is soaking wet, a wet lap with deter me from calling her number. Peepers, when I can pull her out from behind the furnace, collapses like a dog hit with a stun gun and gets her nails done fairly quickly. Twyla starts howling and moaning from the moment I find her and pick her up until I wonder if my neighbors will report me for animal abuse. Then I cannot get rid of her as she knows she is done and she carries that cookie like a flag, showing the other dogs that she is now “safe”. I try and save Diva for the end of day. Fortified with the knowledge that after I get done with the dog that is as difficult to hang on to as a handful of mercury, it HAS to be Happy Hour, somewhere!! No wonder pet owners are intimidated by routine nail care.

And yet, I still get a perverse pleasure from doing nails, even if I am at someone else’s house (except for cats, no way am I taking on a cat). And taking a dog to the vet for any procedure that will require anesthesia, like teeth cleaning, will have me giddy from the moment I make the vet appointment. As I know I will have the opportunity to utter my favorite phrase: “Wack ‘em and pack ‘em!” I could just kiss those feet with short toenails!

In the spirit of the season: A dog is for Life, not just for Christmas. All pets are a 24/7-day in and day out responsibility. I wish everyone and their fur children a safe and Happy Holiday Season and New Year. Please visit www.minpin.org for more info on Miniature Pinschers. Faith Gordon, 15 Elkhart St., Lackawanna, NY 14218, maudminpin@aol.com