

When it Comes to Dogs, Big is Still Beautiful ...

... but restrictive rental housing and expenses can make placement a challenge

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Once upon a time, Americans loved Big: big cars, big houses, big muscles, big hair. Anything they could make, we could make bigger.

But whether it's due to the cool factor of increasingly tiny technology—MP3 players that hold thousands of songs, cell phones that fit in your ear, Smart Cars that look like someone chopped a classic Detroit model in half—or just a gradual realization that we can only get so big before we run out of space, small has become the new big.

There are many good things about the coolness of small, but it's a bummer for at least one constituency: Big dogs. In a world where less is more, the Danes and pits and Labs and St. Bernards and wolfhounds—and the tall, gangly mixed breeds who require the whole backseat of a car for a trip to the vet—often get the short end of the straw.

And especially in difficult economic times, the tiny adorable puppy who grows into a Marmaduke may find himself out of a home.

"In San Diego, even though we have these fabulous dog parks and things, the rental market is very pet-unfriendly," says

Darlene White, executive director of the San Diego Animal Support Foundation (SDASF), a nonprofit that works to support area shelters and rescue groups. "Most of the rentals you find are going to be either 'no pets,' or 'pets under 25 pounds.' So that leaves people with these 50-pound dogs ... with absolutely no place to go," says White. "Our shelters are packed with big dogs due to home foreclosures—it's a really terrible market out here—and with people trying to move into rentals it's very difficult to find ones that will let you take your big dog."

And shelters often struggle to place these larger breeds. White's group has found that, during adoption events that include both small and large breed dogs, the big guys get overlooked. SDASF has started holding an annual "Big Dogs Rock" adoption event to target adopters who are comfortable with bigger pooches and allow the giants to strut their stuff without having to compete with cute little poodles nearby. "Everyone who comes to the event is obviously not looking for a Chihuahua," says White.

In 2008, 118 dogs were available at the event, and almost half went home

with new owners, "which is huge for a one-day event focusing on the dogs that are least likely to get adopted," White points out.

Sometimes an event that celebrates the big guys is just enough to remind people that, in a world where every Tom, Dick, and Harry has an itty-bitty computer and an itty-bitty car and is rightly seeking to leave an itty-bitty carbon footprint, there are some areas of life where you can still think big. (After all, could a Pomeranian enjoy doubling as a footrest? On cold winter nights, would you prefer to share your bed with a shivering teacup poodle, or a wolfhound who can warm you from head to toe?)

In Virginia, the Portsmouth Humane Society staff regularly encourages adopters to consider the larger breeds, says executive director Tereza Marks, who notes that many people think they want a small dog, but don't realize that little dogs are often very high-energy. And adopters like a bargain: As part of a recent adoption event, the shelter discounted adoption fees on big dogs from the usual price of \$147 to \$87.

The discounts help, but sometimes they're not as effective as a little friendly persuasion, says Marks.

MUTTS by Patrick McDonnell



“They all come in wanting a small dog,” she says. “But we talk to them about what their needs are, and a lot of times they want a dog that will just kind of lay around the house. ... We actually had a woman that came in and was looking for a very small dog, and she walked out with a Saint Bernard. We had this dog named Goliath, and ... we just knew his personality was what she looking for. He weighed close to 200 pounds. He was just this big couch potato, friendly as could be, and his favorite thing was to just sit by you and lay by you, and that’s what she wanted ... so we said, ‘Well, you know, are you willing to consider someone a little bigger?’”

Obviously, she was willing! Some people just need a reminder: When it comes to dogs, sometimes more is more. **AS**