

Business

PetSmart debuts doggie raincoats and hoodies for spring



PetSmart launches an exclusive line of weather-proof apparel, by Canadian pet apparel company North Fetch Athletics.

By: Ashante Infantry Business reporter, Published on Wed Mar 27 2013

Why should humans be the only ones getting spruced up for spring?

Pressed by West Coast pet owners, PetSmart has come up with a limited edition line of dog hoodies and slickers exclusively for the Canadian market.

“Over the years, we’ve gotten a number of requests from pet parents in our stores saying ‘Hey, we’re in Vancouver, it rains a lot and it’s a cool spring; we need apparel that allows us to enjoy the outdoors with our pets while keeping them dry, comfortable and clean,’” said John DeFranco the company’s vice president of merchandising, supply chain and marketing.

Some owners rely on garments, like booties and coats, to stop their dogs tracking dirt inside, but some breeds, such as, Whippets and Chihuahuas, which lack thick undercoats, need apparel for warmth, said Toronto dog behaviour consultant Deena Cooper.

“Lots of sensitive breeds can’t take long periods of the cold, especially dogs of a mixed breed and maybe low to the ground and long in the body and short in the legs,” she said. “There’s nothing worse than seeing a dog in the winter shivering while you’re chatting away to your new café latte doggie friend.”

But choosing the right item is crucial, said Toronto’s Lawrence LeVoir, operator of The Groomery Spa & Bistro which carries outerwear by Vancouver’s RC Pet Products.

“If it’s too heavy and too tight it doesn’t provide warmth,” he explained. “I recommend something light, somewhat loose, easy to put on and off. It’s not something that they love —having something pulled over their head.

“I have a big 2-year-old show standard poodle, he hates clothes. When I put his rain slicker on him you can tell it kind of bothers him. I only do it because I don’t want him to get wet. His curly poodle coat would turn into Bob Marley pretty quickly with a little bit of rain.”

PetSmart commissioned Toronto pet apparel company North Fetch Athletics to develop functional, stylish spring garb which is available in stores and online until the end of April.

“One of the things we found is that pet parents want their pets to also be a reflection of their own style,” said DeFranco. “Things like ski wear and parkas have provided some inspiration.

Although LeVoir is obviously partial to seeing pets shown off with “nice grooming more than fancy clothes” he understands the effort.

“We show our personality by dressing and people dress their pets to show personality,” he said. “Paris Hilton, all these Real Housewives, they’ve always got clothes on their dogs and they’re trying to outdo their dogs. Many companies are responding to it. You can buy designer doggy clothes now. If you go to The Bay you can get doggie clothes in the Bay colours and stripes.”

On average Canadians spend \$101 per year on non-food related supplies for their pets, according to a recent IPSOS survey on behalf of PetSmart.

Trainer Cooper of deenaspeaksdog.com has seen dogs in co-ordinated outfits and \$400 Chanel collars, but she’s least enamoured of pets in Halloween costumes, such as hot dog and skunk, which are all the rage.

However, with bumble bee as the top choice last Halloween, “that’s actually the fastest growing segment of our apparel business,” said DeFranco noting an “increased trend in apparel sales, specifically dog apparel sales.”

“A lot of research shows that the pet category is very resilient. Although it’s not immune from the economy in some of the conversation and research we found is that even in difficult times pets are a critical part of people’s families and our pet parents continue to spend on their pets.”

Correction - April 3, 2013: This article was edited from a previous version that misstated the name of Groomery Spa & Bistro.