

Dog duds are haute stuff

By **Kate Santich** / *THE ORLANDO (FLA.) SENTINEL*



Sasha seems to have all the makings of a supermodel - she's leggy, exotic-looking, full of attitude and so chic that she doesn't even need a last name. The camera loves her.

But in her debut on the catwalk, on a recent balmy night at a College Park, Fla., fashion show, Sasha turned her moment in the spotlight into a spectacle. First, she started sniffing the other models in unmentionable places. Then she tried to shake off her dress and strut around naked. When that failed, she spun in circles, biting at the fabric over her derrière.

It's probably safe to assume the long-coat Chihuahua won't be on the cover of Elle anytime soon.

Then again, the wildly successful world of canine couture is nothing if not outrageous. How else to explain the global popularity of doggy dresses, vests, bikinis, kimonos, hoodies, booties, rain slickers, tennis outfits and tuxedos? How else to explain a \$5,000 alligator-skin dog collar and leash set or a \$350 Fido-sized Burberry trench coat?

Bloomingdale's, Neiman-Marcus, Gucci, Louis Vuitton - all have pawed their way into the pet-accessories market, an industry that raked in an estimated \$8 billion last year. No one knows exactly how much of that is for fashion, as opposed to, say, bowls or toys, but everyone agrees it's growing.

"It's phenomenal. Absolutely phenomenal," says Jody Goldman, owner of Dog & Friends, a Florida boutique. "We sell a dozen pieces of clothing a day now. You wouldn't believe it."

A first-ever canine-couture event took place recently at New York's Meccalike Fashion Week. Amid the unveiling of Kenneth Cole's and Ralph Lauren's and Vera Wang's latest work, discount retailer Target paraded poodles, terriers and hounds in casual, glamour and classic collections, including pooch-wear by celebrated designers Isaac Mizrahi and Michael Graves.

"It's out of control," says Daryl Abrams, director of pet accessories for très trendy Von Dutch Originals, a division that opened just five weeks ago and already has sold more than \$100,000 in merchandise. "This is just the beginning."