

Protect Your Dog's Paws in the Cold

By Steve Dale for *The Dog Daily*



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."

Running with the big dogs

The trend is mostly a small-breed phenomenon and dates back to a teacup Chihuahua named Bruiser in the 2001 Reese Witherspoon hit "Legally Blonde." The tiny dog was a shameless fashionista.

The Japanese loved it. Soon too did chichi Aussies, Kiwis, French and Brits, spawning a legion of pricey boutiques and Web sites and one tongue-in-cheek Dogue magazine.

"Which just goes to show you that wackiness is international," says Longwood, Fla., veterinarian Rick Marrinson, a frequent radio and TV commentator on pet issues. "Not that there's anything wrong with

that."

These days, celebrities everywhere are accessorizing their pets - Paris Hilton's pooch, Tinkerbell, seemingly wouldn't be caught dead in public naked.

"In L.A., it's almost stranger not to have clothes on your little dog," says Santa Monica, Calif., publicist Berri Goldfarb, who is representing Kara Kono.

Kono, a 22-year-old film and TV major at Florida's Seminole Community College, originally set out to be a teacher. But after a gal-pal trip to New York two years ago - during which Kono shelled out \$500 at various pet boutiques for her miniature Pomeranian pup, Rizzo - a new career path emerged. In January 2004, she bought a sewing machine, took lessons and started mixing hot pink satins and beaded lace to come up with her own, admittedly "over-the-top," line.

Her father is the prime financial backer for Love Furever Canine Couture, and Kono's mom is in charge of the seamstresses.

From puppy pj's to fur collars

But four-legged fashion isn't solely for the well-heeled. Oh, sure, Yap Wear and Von Dutch hoodies retail for roughly \$50 to \$60, but Target is pricing its new line at less than \$15.

So who's buying?

"Some are people who do not have children, and so their pets are their children," says Brian Wettstein, co-owner of the Doggie Door in Winter Park, Fla. "And some people are pre-children, and this is just practice."

His store now stocks everything from doggy pajamas to faux leather biker jackets to velour warm-up suits. There are even fit sessions so Wettstein can keep a dog's measurements on file.

Among the customers on his call list is Dawn Yager, a 24-year-old Orlando woman who is studying business at the University of Central Florida. The apple of Yager's eye is a 3-year-old, 4-pound teacup Chihuahua named Torie, whose wardrobe is never lacking.

"If I'm wearing pink, she's wearing pink," Yager says. "We have sweat shirts and sweaters, and she has a winter coat with, like, real fur around the collar."