

# Nomad Editions *Good Dog*

September 21, 2011



**QUITE A PAIR**  
The surprising trend in  
pet plastic surgery

*Feature*

# Pet Plastic Surgery

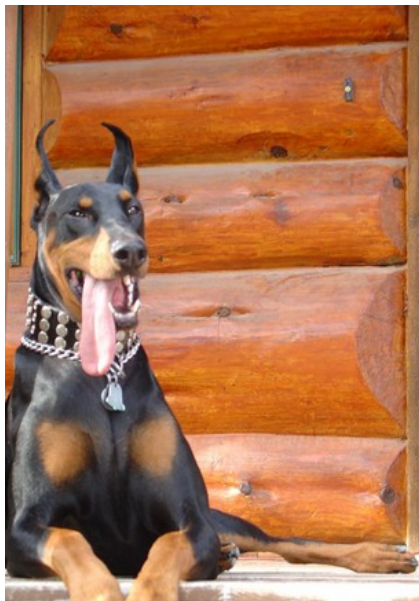


BURT GLINN /  
MAGNUM PHOTOS

*Nuts to You*

**Prostheses  
restore a  
neutered dog's  
manhood  
— or is it his  
owner's?**

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN



**Doberman Pinscher Duke's before- and after- shots with ear implants.** BRYCE CROUSORE

Kevin Parker's male Bullmastiff is two-and-a half years old and hasn't been neutered. Parker and his wife had considered breeding Rooney, but then he started acting aggressively toward a customer at the couple's locksmith shop in Palm Beach County, Florida, where he spends his days. Perhaps it was time to tame the testosterone, Parker thought. But castration wasn't an easy sell.

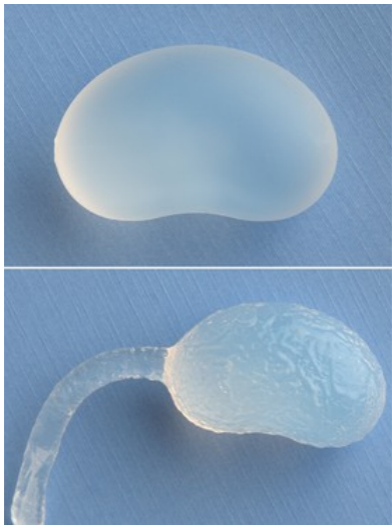
"For my male sense of pride I didn't want a dog with no nuts," said Parker, acknowledging that he was against neutering for "all the stereotypical male reasons." But while surfing the web, he came across a solution: silicone spheres that replace natural testicles. They look authentic enough to fool any manliness-assessing human and may even deceive canine suitors. The product that saved the day? Neuticles.

These days, there are more ways than ever for owners to change the physical



**Macho mutt. The inventor of Neuticles, Gregg Miller, plays with his dog Winston, a satisfied customer.** ADAM VOGLER

appearance of their dogs. Plastic surgery — which encompasses any procedure in which the shape of an anatomic structure is altered — ranges from testicular



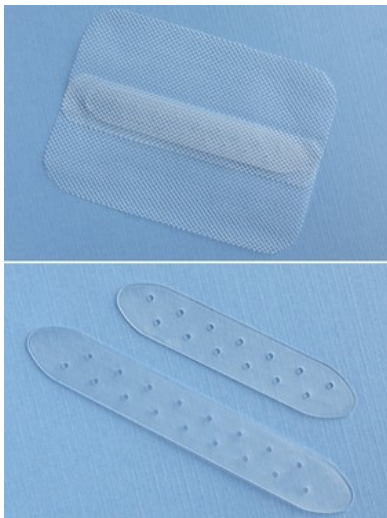
**A new package. Replacement testicles improve a neutered dog's appearance and can promote healing.** MIKE CHALOUPKA / IMAGES WEST PHOTO

implants and tail trims to face lifts and nose jobs. While some of these procedures have medical motives, others

are based on breed standards so old that they make Lassie and Benji look cutting edge. Still others are performed simply because the owner wants their pet to look a certain way.

Dogs, of course, don't care how they look. So how much freedom should owners enjoy when it comes to putting their shepherds and shih tzus through inherently risky surgeries simply for aesthetics or convenience? The argument for Neuticles is that they persuade reluctant owners such as Parker to move forward with neutering — which not only helps control overpopulation but benefits the dog's health.

Parker concedes that Rooney probably doesn't need the pair of mail-order balls that are scheduled to be implanted later this fall. "There's no real reason to have them except for those of us who have a little bit of disposable income," Parker said, "and to make sure he's prideful. I



**Repair kit. PermaStay implants restore ear perkiness to broken or floppy ears.** MIKE

CHALOUPKA / IMAGES WEST PHOTO

said, "and to make sure he's prideful. I wanted to know I could hold my head high when people saw my dog."

Flavia Delmastro, DVM, who owns Fulton Animal Hospital just south of Baltimore, said she has implanted Neuticles a half dozen times since 2003 and hasn't run into any complications. She's found that they can help a dog's recovery immediately after surgery because the implants fill the sac that would otherwise be empty, preventing swelling.

Delmastro, who breeds Rottweilers with her husband — and implanted Neuticles in her pup Bruno — recommends that dogs be full-grown before Neuticles are implanted. Sometimes that's as old as three for larger breeds. She said it's usually the husbands — including her own — who want the implants for the dog. "But if that's what you need to do to convince people to neuter," she said, "then I think it's a good idea." The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) agrees: The

organization has endorsed testicular implants as long as they're inserted at the same time as the neutering.

Neuticles founder Gregg Miller, a former ad man who was vehemently opposed to traditional neutering before he invented the product in 1995, runs the company out of his home outside Kansas City, Missouri. "It's become our culture to have everything cut off and to accept emasculation of our pet," Miller said. "Neuticles deviates from that."

To date, Miller said more than 450,000 dogs have been "Neuticled" at thousands of veterinary clinics. The implants range in price from \$109 to \$599 a pair, depending on the size and the type of materials used. He said customers tend to be what he calls "extreme pet owners" of purebred dogs, of which he is one. His boxer Winston, for example, has his own La-Z-Boy, his own bedroom and drinks only chilled Dasani water. But Miller also

only chilled Dasani water. But Miller also claims that the implants are not just for humans' peace of mind. "If my dog lost his eye or his tail, he'd know," Miller said. "Why wouldn't he know if a familiar body part were missing? Dogs aren't stupid."

Miller said much of his time these days is spent judging the size of testicles. While he has a size chart on his website (where one can also find Neuticles t-shirts and hoodies), he still consults with most customers on the phone.

"Everybody wants a bigger one than the dog already had," he said. "You'd be amazed at the people who want to put extra-large testicles on a small dog. It's inhumane, and I won't allow it." But certain breeds do have testicles that are disproportionate to their size. Boxers and pit bulls are notoriously under-endowed, Miller said, compared to other breeds of the same weight, while an 18-pound Jack Russell Terrier would be fitted with the



the same weight, while an 18-pound Jack Russell Terrier would be fitted with the same size Neuticles as a breed four times its weight.

More recently, Miller developed two purely cosmetic products (with no benefit to society, as could be reasoned with Neuticles): an eye implant that gives one-eyed Fido a convex bulge rather than an unsightly depression at the site of his sewn-shut eyelid; and PermaStay, which is targeted at owners whose dogs' ear cropping was unsuccessful. While some owners might find the one-straight, one-floppy look endearing on Great Danes, Dobermans or German Shepherds, Miller said it infuriates others — especially if they've paid thousands of dollars for a dog with papers, lineage and the archetypical look of its breed. "It drives the owner crazy, because one ear is up, and one's down," he said. The surgical implant, made from FDA-approved mesh

and fluoroplastic materials, "makes the dog look the way he's supposed to look."

Of course, the way a dog is "supposed" to look is often a matter of opinion, fashion — or tradition. Once upon a time, there were grounds for cutting a dog's tail or ears—including health reasons, according to the American Kennel Society (AKC). A rat terrier, for instance, would have his tail docked to prevent the infection that could ensue from inevitable rat bites. The procedures might have also prevented workplace injuries for sport fighting or hunting dogs. These days however, the vast majority of dogs are not encountering such perilous environments. Yet according to the AKC, there are still more than 70 breeds whose standard requires cropping ears or docking tails. These procedures, an AKC spokeswoman said, are acceptable practices and are "not cosmetic."

But the AKC and the individual breed clubs don't have many other organizations in their corner on this subject matter. Both practices are controversial and are not generally taught in veterinary schools. Not only is it mutilation (a term used by the U.K.'s Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) but there is concern that the practices may affect socialization because dogs' ears and tails are part of their body language — and who knows what those wagging extremities are actually saying? The ASPCA, Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA), American Veterinary Medical Association and many European countries oppose these cosmetic surgical procedures. As far back as the 1930s, the ASPCA awarded a prize at the Westminster dog show for the best dog competing in its natural state, yet belonging to a breed that was traditionally cropped or docked. More

traditionally cropped or docked. More recently, the HSVMA ran a photo contest to promote dogs with natural tails and ears.

"A lot of people will say, 'Oh, what's an ear flap.' Or they think a tail is just decorative," said Barbara Hodges, DVM, a consultant for the HSVMA. "Well, tails help a dog balance, and both ears and tails are very important means of communication. When I walk into an exam room to see a patient, I often look at the body language. If parts of their body are missing, I have less information."

Louise Murray, DVM, vice president of the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital, agreed that a dog without a tail has trouble communicating. "It's like if you didn't have a mouth," she said. "Are you smiling, frowning? The dogs have no way to say, 'I come in peace.'"

Ear-cropping and tail-docking typically

occur in puppyhood. Beyond the inherent pain associated with removing part of the body, surgery always carries risks: complications from anesthesia, infection and blood loss. Occasionally, dogs who have undergone these procedures have a lifetime of chronic pain or behavioral issues. Hodges has seen dogs who constantly chew at the remnant of their tail — long after it's healed — which could be indicative of the phantom pain commonly experienced by amputees.

"The docking is talked about as a non-serious procedure, but they are amputations," she said. "The tail happens to be a continuation of the spinal cord. There are vertebrae and nerves in there." After ears — among a dog's most sensitive parts — are cropped, some canines become "head shy" and don't want their head or ears touched. Battle-cropping is a severe form of cropping common among pit bulls, originating from

common among pit bulls, originating from the idea that his opponent wouldn't be able to grab onto his ears in a fight, and leaving the dog with almost no ear.

When front dewclaws are removed, dogs may be less agile, because they often depend on that claw to grip the ground when turning. Murray said dogs with that claw removed have a tendency to develop arthritis of the wrists or have problems with balance. Rear dewclaws are less functional and may be removed for safety reasons.

Perhaps the most notorious of the convenience surgeries is devocalization, in which the dog's vocal cords are removed because the owner is bothered by the animal's barking. Last year, Massachusetts became the first state to ban the surgery. Anyone who cuts or removes an animal's vocal cords for non-medical purposes may be fined up to \$2,500 and sentenced to up to five years

in prison.

While many oppose plastic surgery performed solely for cosmetic reasons, there are few reservations about these procedures for medical or therapeutic purposes. The medical community wouldn't think twice about removing part of a tail if, for instance, it's hosting a malignant tumor.

John Lewis, DVM, assistant professor of dentistry and oral surgery at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, said he often does facial reconstruction in dogs that have had oral or facial cancers. When he has to remove the lower jaw because a tumor is invading the adjacent soft tissue, he reconstructs the corner of the lips to try to provide support for the tongue, so it doesn't protrude.

Lewis said he prepares owners for their dog's appearance after an oral tumor is removed by showing them pictures of

what to expect. "Even when owners say it doesn't bother them to see the pictures of other pets, when it's their pet, it's something different," he said. "So we do everything to make the pets as aesthetically pleasing as we can." But Lewis said the cosmetic issue is hardly a problem for the patients. "These dogs are amazing at how well they can bounce back from a surgery — aesthetically and physically."

Sometimes the very features we love in our pups can cause problems. Droopy eyes (or entropion and ectropion, if you're a vet) are genetic conditions for certain breeds, especially bloodhounds, bulldogs and Shar Peis. Surgery pulls the inward or outward-folding eyelid back to a normal position if there are complications such as conjunctivitis, or the eyelashes rub against and scratch the cornea.

Among the short-nosed and flat-faced

breeds like bulldogs and pugs, years of breeding for a desired look has caused numerous hereditary problems. They are often born with narrow nasal passages and an elongated soft palette that create a compressed breathing apparatus — think about inhaling through a straw your whole life. The negative pressure in the dog's airway can eventually cause problems for his voice box and trachea. So veterinarians perform what we call rhinoplasty or a nose job, in which the dog's nasal openings are widened. At the same time, surgery can correct the elongated soft palate and remove some deep facial folds if they are causing infections. Lewis suggests owners with these breeds have their dogs evaluated during their first year to assess whether preventative surgery is prudent.

And on the topic of surgery to prevent future ailments, how about Neuticles? The first Neuticles Dr. Delmastro

implanted were in a Dachshund named Mario, in 2003. "He was already 11 years old and never neutered," she said. "The older they get, the more chance for them to get cancer of the prostate or cancer of the testicles. Not neutering them is playing Russian Roulette."

So the Dachshund was neutered, and moments later, voila! He was endowed with faux testicles. And whether a potential cancer was averted or machismo (hound's or human's) beget longevity, one thing is certain: Eight years later, Mario and his Neuticles are still going strong. ■