



PetsMatter

Learning how to take better care of your pets.



Living With Pets Who Have Missing Limbs

By Jen Reeder

Kandu, a seven-year-old “mostly” Jack Russell terrier, was born without front legs, so his owners took him to a veterinarian in Evergreen, Colo., to be euthanized. The veterinarian refused — and Kandu was adopted by Ken and Melissa Rogers, who found that Kandu has adapted quite well to his disability.

“We have a blast,” Ken says of life with Kandu.

“Don’t look past the dogs with disabilities. They can adapt and make great pets.”

The couple sought advice from OrthoPets, a Denver-based company specializing in prosthetic and orthopedic mobility options for dogs. A type of wheelchair was devised to help Kandu get around outside. They strap him into a plastic, padded vest that connects to in-line skate wheels. That way, he can push himself down a ramp that they had installed to get to the dog run in the backyard. In the snow, Kandu trades in his wheels for a mono-ski, which he loves because it’s lighter than the wheeled “gizmo.”

“Now we’re experimenting with water wings,” Ken says, so that Kandu can fetch sticks out of a lake like other dogs.

Because of Kandu’s “great spirit,” he is now a Delta Society–registered therapy dog who visits hospital patients and senior citizens.

“Don’t look past the dogs with disabilities,” Ken says. “They can adapt and make great pets.”

Such resilience of pets with missing or amputated limbs is the norm, according to M.J. Hamilton, DVM, an oncology resident at Michigan State University’s Animal Cancer Care Clinic.

“In general, they ambulate quite well,” Hamilton says.

While three-legged pets usually do not need carts or prosthetic limbs, it’s more of a challenge for dogs and cats who are missing multiple limbs. Carts are widely used, but they can be costly, Hamilton explains. But external prosthetic limbs are uncommon because they are cumbersome, and implantable prosthetic limbs, in which a pin is driven into the bone to attach the prosthesis, are still in the experimental stage.

Pet owners should discuss questions and concerns with their veterinarian, who may also be able to get them in touch with other owners of pets with missing limbs, Hamilton suggests. The main issue when considering aids like carts is whether the dog or cat has joint disease.



Dare

Dare, a four-year-old Shetland sheepdog who lost both of his left legs in a puppy mill in Kansas, faces the challenge of having his missing limbs on the same side of his body. This prevents him from being able to use a cart, because he lacks the strength to pull himself with just one leg. He also has severe arthritis in his back hip. His adoptive owner, Denver resident Tami Skinner, takes Dare swimming twice a week for physical therapy because it’s easy on his joints. Skinner has made other modifications to help Dare adapt. For example, she leaves his water bowl next to a wall so that he can lean on the wall to drink, and she holds him upright when he needs to relieve himself.

“As long as he’s moving, he’s cool,” Skinner says. “If he stops, he falls over — unless he has me, the wall, or another dog to lean on.”

Now Dare, also a Delta Society–registered therapy dog, visits an amputee support group, children with disabilities, and adults with multiple sclerosis.

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Kandu

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"People tell me all the time that he's lucky to have me, but I don't consider it that way: I'm lucky to have him," Skinner says.

Jen Reeder writes about pet health topics from her home office in Denver.

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