

Reliable Enough to Have Pets

I used to believe that there are two kinds of people in the world – those who like cats and those who own furniture that they care about. I don't know about you, but I think twice before putting the fate of a \$2500 sofa in the hands (paws?) of animals with brains the size of walnuts.

This wasn't a concern until LuAnn and I adopted two new cats last week. All of our previous cats had been declawed in the front, but our new ones have 36 claws between them (five on each front, four on each rear). So far they have been confined to a room with minimal fabric, but I fear what may happen as we allow them to expand their territory.

A couple of months ago I wrote about the untimely demise of our last feline, and we knew it was just a matter of time before we acquired another (or two, in this case). We prefer cats over other domestic critters, and if you do not, you are now officially in the minority. Cats recently overtook dogs as the most popular pet in the United States, with more than 80 million of them prowling around.

While researching the above statistic, I discovered that the Internet is full of useless facts about cats. The most interesting I ran across concerns terminal velocity – the maximum speed that is reached by a free-falling body. A falling man can reach 130 mph, while a falling cat (due to aerodynamics, light bone structure and wind resistance from fur) clocks in at only 60 mph. Good to know.

I used to be a little nervous about cats. They seemed barely tame at times and would occasionally go nuts temporarily for no apparent reason. Not unlike spouses, now that I think about it.

We once had a cat that liked to sleep up by our heads next to our pillows. I don't believe that cats will suck the breath out of you while you're sleeping (like witch-cats were once rumored to do), but it stands to reason that there is only a limited amount of oxygen in the air surrounding my head while I'm asleep.

This particular cat was a big animal, and I'm sure he sucked in more than his share of O₂. Worse, he tended generate methane, if you know what I mean. No matter how you look at it, an animal that sits by your head all night depleting the oxygen and replacing it with a lethal gas is not a good thing. We somehow survived, which is more than I could eventually say for the cat.

Until this year, all of our previous cats have strayed into our lives and adopted us, not the other way around. Our two new pets, Gizmo and Carly, were found at a rescue operation in Waterloo called TigeraCat. They were members of a feral colony that were trapped by rescuers, so we are their first owners.

I don't know if TigeraCat's owner-screening procedure is typical, but the FBI may have designed it. LuAnn filled out a four-page form and provided three personal references (not including our veterinarian and the person who cares for our cats while we're away) - they all received phone calls.

The Humane Society of the United States estimates that 14% of pets are obtained from shelters, 48% are acquired as strays, from friends or from animal rescuers, and 38% from breeders or pet stores. It also estimates that almost 8 million cats and dogs enter shelters each year and unfortunately over half of them are eventually euthanized.

In these days following the BP oil disaster, it's almost impossible to avoid seeing heartbreaking photos of gulf wildlife covered in oil. Most of us would do something to help if we could, but our options for saving those particular animals are limited.

What is within our power is to make the Iowa City Animal Care and Adoption Center (icanimalcenter.org) our first stop when we are looking for a pet. Its fundraising entity, Friends of the Animal Center Foundation (facf.org) is also a worthy destination for a donation check. Every little bit helps.

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