

A pet peeve or the dog's bollocks?

Paws, snores and more. We explore what co-sleeping with your dog means for you, them and anyone caught in the crossfire.

By Henry Hurt

For dog owners, deciding whether to share a bed with their furry friends is a divisive and timeless debate. I will unabashedly tell anyone I meet that my best friend is a 10-year-old spaniel named George, but when it comes to the nighttime routine and the social hierarchy woven into it, it can cause problems for

many people. Some cherish the closeness of a fluffy little so-and-so breaching the cold, empty sheets of a king-sized bed, while others see it as a boundary better left uncrossed.

For Josh Cowden, a 33-year-old personal trainer, the idea of dogs off the bed is unthinkable. Growing up with dogs, Josh built his life around them and now shares his bed with three snow-white West Highland Terriers. "I have always had dogs on the bed. It wouldn't surprise me if I had dogs in the cot with me as a baby," he jokes. Josh views his dogs' presence as a source of all-encompassing comfort rather than a hindrance. "Their presence is very calming. It soothes the soul," he says, adding that his dogs act as little radiators, saving him money on heating bills. This is a point that should be considered with rising bills and the inevitability of a relentlessly inconsistent British winter.



Josh even built a little staircase for his Westies out of a wooden pallet in his garden to help them get onto the bed. The simple but elegant creation had been crafted from a wooden pallet that littered his garden for several months. Josh agreed, though, with the notions of hierarchical issues. “They all desire the spare pillow, which can get cumbersome.” Despite this, Josh insists that sleeping without his dogs feels unnatural. “When I go away, it’s so strange not to have them there.” The interview did somewhat tail off this as we pondered our respective dog’s necessity to commandeer our pillows.

Karen O’Leary, a dog trainer and Easy Peasy Puppy instructor, says that whether dogs should share their beds is a totally personal choice. “It should be an all-or-nothing thing. It’s confusing for a dog if you

allow it sometimes but not others.” Karen’s own experiences highlight both the benefits and drawbacks. “I had a history of depression, and I found that sleeping with dogs actually helps with that. It can be a sleep aid.” Though it was not all sunshine and rainbows, Karen agreed, acknowledging the capacity for challenges: “I have a huge dog who likes to sleep sideways. He couldn’t care less where you are. Rolling over is sometimes impossible.”

This also brought up possible behaviour issues, like resource guarding. If a dog tends to guard its space, that could be a problem. “For example, if someone gets up to use the bathroom and the dog claims their spot, it might lead to tension.” In those cases, Karen recommends keeping dogs off the bed and finding another place for them to sleep.

During the summertime, when the bed is essentially too warm for George, he enjoys sleeping on the much cooler bathroom floor. This is one of many alternatives. Growing up with literally hundreds of rescues has made it clear that this is always a dog-dependent matter. While these issues can seem intimidating, they’re usually minor and can be solved with compassion and patience—and Karen agreed. Tracking back to the poo-eating situation, Karen had no words of wisdom or miracle cures for this issue, instead saying it was essentially a fact of life.

On the other end of the spectrum, a seasoned dog breeder, Hannah Putnam, advises against allowing dogs on the bed and bringing up the behaviour and cleanliness issues. “They can become possessive and territorial from a young age,”





she explains. Male dogs, in particular, are inclined in such a way. But Hannah notes it can be mitigated by the removal of their ‘bits’. As a breeder, she practices what she preaches by crating her puppies until they leave for their new homes. “You really must be mad not to crate a puppy or have a complete disregard for any carpets you own.” Crating is not the question at hand. However, it is not practical to have a litter of puppies running a muck on the bed; this is without dispute.

Nevertheless, when it comes to adult dogs, Hannah acknowledges a gap between her seemingly stead-

fast personal beliefs. There lies an inarguable divide within her household. Two of her dogs sleep at the foot of her bed while the others languish in the depths of the utility room. She didn’t comment on the details of the promotion and relegation system at play but said that a regular dog bed suffices for the two in her utility. She justifies this arrangement by pointing to her dogs’ historical roles. “There was once a time when dachshunds hunted badgers. They don’t need to be on the bed. They don’t need a bed the size of an island.” For Hannah, it’s all about balancing practicality and affection, this being not only for her sanity

but also very much for the wellbeing of her four dogs.

Working on the guise, it is acceptable and healthy for oneself and the dog to distribute duvet coverage evenly; it raises one final question: what if you don’t share the bed solely with your loyal canine? Mimi Devlin, a 22-year-old marketing executive, learned firsthand how tumultuous the issue of dogs on the bed can be. Looking back on her nine-month relationship, she says, “I don’t hate dogs; I could see myself having one. But I’d rather have a clean dog waiting for me in the kitchen.” However, this battle for comfort, poise and peacefulness caused the

end of her loving relationship with her former partner.

Mimi and her two sisters had always been denied the blessing of a pet in any capacity, so the experience of sharing a bed with Walter, her ex-boyfriend's Bretan, was a shock. "My ex believed it was the same as my jellycats. It's not the same. I've never seen my jellycats eat poo." Mimi's candour raised an excellent point; it is true, from my experience, jellycats seldom eat poo.

There were not only hygiene concerns; from a sheer logistical standpoint, Mimi raised another fair point. At 5'1, she felt dwarfed by Walter, who took up significant bed space. "He kept licking me in the night and stepping on me. It was like he was telling me to move." Hygiene concerns return here somewhat, but we shall continue on the issues of hierarchy. Walter, after long, muddy runs, was allowed to let the dirt dry and fall off instead of being bathed. Mimi recalls, "A thick layer of sandy mud would cover the bed." Looking back, it seems Walter was probably prioritised in that relationship, but that's another story.

"Losing to Walter stung," she admits. However, she demanded that I make it abundantly clear she harbours no ill will toward the dog himself, concluding Walter was pretty "sound". Looking back, it creates a good question: to sleep, you must have an all-encompassing safe space. With the waves of dirt and size disparity looming firmly over the head for Mimi. Could she be expected to get her 8 hours? Hannah rightly attests to the history of many a rough and rugged dog



breed. They don't need the high thread count or a wealth of decreative pillows.

Fascinatingly, a dog's position in a bed isn't really about the dog – it's about the humans involved. All the evidence suggests that the dog is fine wherever it is; as long as it's comfy and consistent, the dog shall not falter. The issues of guarding or anxiety over its owner tossing and turning seem to be relatively inconsequential. Nonetheless, it provides an elegant insight into how humans perceive man's

best friend. The issue was a dealbreaker for Mimi, highlighting differing priorities and perspectives. For Hannah, it's about finding a consistent approach that works for both the dog and the owner. And for Josh, it's a source of comfort and companionship that outweighs the occasional inconvenience. Meanwhile, Karen's perspective underscores the importance of boundaries and training.

The answers lie firmly within the relationship you possess with your dog. As

Karen wisely puts it, "It's not a black-and-white answer." Whether enforcing the no-dogs-on-the-bed rule or arranging your three westies to share the remaining pillow space amongst them best, the goal is to allow all parties to be sufficiently secure and adequately rested by tomorrow. Throughout my life, I know I will always side with Josh for better or worse, knowing that it does feel unusual to sleep without my gang. Though, I am sure a mass of Mimi's exist with a host of firm but fair nighttime boundaries.

