



With patience, a harness, and tasty incentives, Carie Lewis transformed her cat, Louie, into her walking companion.

Fettered Felines

Tame your kitty to the ways of the harness, and unleash his inner beast

by ANDY MACALPINE

When Carie Lewis gets home from work, she makes a beeline for the courtyard of her Maryland apartment complex, her beloved pet in tow. As neighbors go about their business, Lewis' walking partner plays in the grass and explores for a few glorious minutes.

Nothing so unusual about that—except the animal on the other end of the leash is a cat.

“People are fascinated by it; they don't expect to see a cat outside of the house or on a leash,” says Lewis, The HSUS's Internet marketing manager. “But I'm a big cat person, and I wanted to be able to walk him outside and take him places with me.”

Though Louie and his fellow felines are safest living in the great indoors, a little su-

pervised playtime outside is a safe way to indulge a cat pining for fresh air. Cats are natural predators, and just chasing a leaf can help them feel like kings of the jungle.

And yes, you *can* try this at home. Though timid or aggressive cats may not enjoy the experience, a catwalk can become a special treat for more adventurous souls. Just don't expect your little buddy to take to it overnight—there's a reason so many believe that no one ever really owns a cat.

CATS ARE NOT LITTLE DOGS

Leash training cats requires time and effort. Set goals: Do you want the cat to walk with you, or do you simply want to enjoy the outdoors together without fear of losing

him? Be patient and expect to progress only as quickly as your kitty will allow. There's a good chance he won't have any idea what you're trying to do with him at first.

“You'll get out of the cat what you put into [him],” says Kevin Simpson, director of animal training and behavior at the Washington Humane Society in Washington, D.C. “It's important to understand that this isn't going to be a dog pulling on a leash. It can take lots and lots of repetition.”

And because a cat isn't likely to adopt a doggie demeanor of bounding out the door and down the steps, he may need some gentle coaxing. The Washington Humane Society's “MasCat,” Gregory Xavier Pibb—known more affectionately as Mr. Pibb—was a bit of a 'fraidycat when faced with the opportunity to galavant around the neighborhood. To help him ease into it, his human friends walked him around in a carrier.

Eventually, Mr. Pibb learned to use his own four feet while wearing a harness and leash. The year-old tuxedo cat is so content now that he even relieves himself in the grass.

“Mr. Pibb went through developmental stages where he was more sensitive to the outdoors, and we had to really take our time,” Simpson says. “He's comfortable now, but he is still not fond of the cool weather.”

When Lewis first started leash training about a year ago, Louie needed some lessons to adjust to wearing a harness on his back. With repetition and the promise of tasty rewards, initial signs of success came in just a few weeks.

“At first, he thought the harness was weighing him down, and he would only go low to the ground,” Lewis says. “But I had someone stand in front of us with treats, and Louie would walk to the treat with the harness on. When he got more comfortable, he was a lot better at it. But he didn't even move at first.”

Leash lessons will elicit a variety of reactions. For Shirley De la Torre, training 3½-month-old Kemet was much easier than working with her two older cats.

“He just loves it,” says De la Torre, who lives in Stillwater, Minn. “As soon as I pick up the leash, he runs to the door just like a dog.

And he purrs the whole time we're outside."

Simpson advises starting training at a young age when possible, but don't rule it out for aging kitties; personality and level of socialization can often trump the stereotypes.

Regardless of your cat's age, proceed safely and gently with training. Select a harness that fits snugly enough to keep her from wiggling out of it—and do not attach the leash to a collar. Avoid retractable leashes, since the force of the recoil could overwhelm a cat. Never yank the leash or scold; one negative experience can turn a cat off from the process forever.

When De la Torre taught her kitten, she put the harness on him and watched as he wandered around the house while wearing it. Then she added a leash and watched him wander a little more. When Kemet appeared to be comfortable with his new accessory, De la Torre took him into her yard to explore.

Families with older cats might have to progress more slowly. Cats set in their ways get cranky if they are forced from familiar routines. But don't give up! Even world-weary felines can be motivated. Start by laying the harness and leash next to your cat's bed so he can get used to its sights and

smells at his own pace. When he is ready to wear the harness, put it on him at dinnertime and feed him immediately so the almighty kibble acts as a reward. When he is accustomed to the harness, let him walk through the house wearing it. Keep taking small steps toward venturing outside into a quiet area.

NOT EVERY CAT KEEPS HIS COOL

Consult your veterinarian before taking any pet outdoors to make sure vaccinations and flea treatments are up to date. All cats, including those who never go outside, should wear a collar and I.D. tag. Consider having your pet microchipped, too.

And if your cat has never been beyond the front door, keep an eye out for signs that he is overwhelmed: lying down, standing in a defensive posture, even yowling excessively.

If your pet shows any of these signs, pick him up, take him inside, and try again another time.

"Sometimes they lie down because

they're timid and want a place to hide," Simpson says. "In situations like that, it's time to backpedal and take some smaller steps. Maybe find a quieter place not so far from home. You have to let them wrap their brains around it all, so to speak."

Watch for other behavior changes that may result from your cat's journeys into expanded territory. Be careful when opening the door to the outside—once cats experience the wonders of nature, they might make a break for it whenever the opportunity presents itself. Some cats might yowl or spray more frequently.

Still, says Simpson, the benefits usually outweigh the negative effects. Besides, cats can have fun, too.

"That was kind of the idea behind a cat mascot, to show the community the possibility a cat has," he says. "You don't have to limit a cat or hold them to a preconceived notion."



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