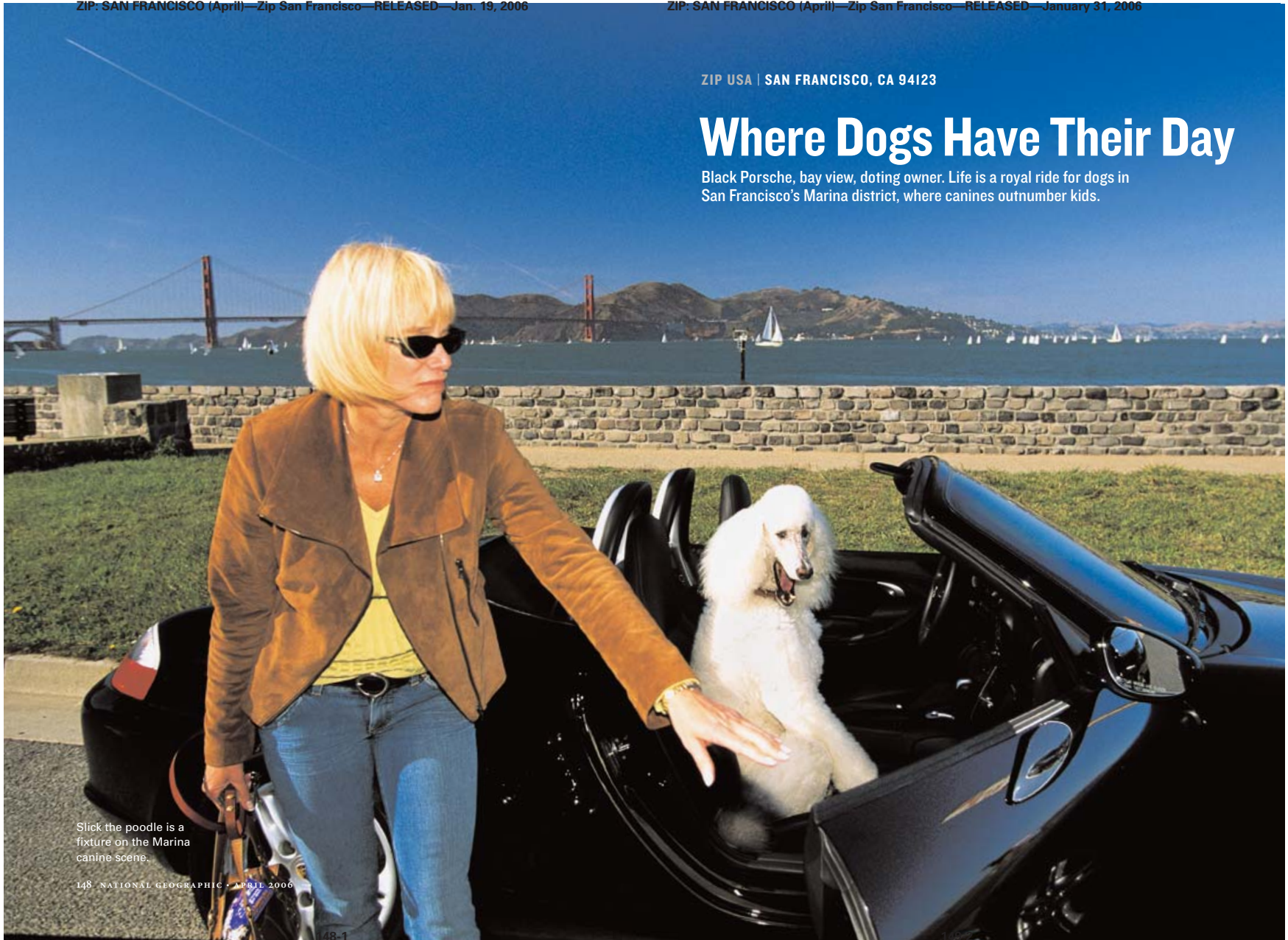


ZIP USA | SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94123

Where Dogs Have Their Day

Black Porsche, bay view, doting owner. Life is a royal ride for dogs in San Francisco's Marina district, where canines outnumber kids.

Slick the poodle is a fixture on the Marina canine scene.



BY MICHAEL MASON PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE KARNOW



Leo poses for local artist Patti Miller, whose Matisse-inspired portraits go for about \$1,500. Upscale shops welcome dog walker Julia Frink and clients; owners demand the shih tzus return home with immaculate paws.

On any given afternoon in San Francisco's Marina district, dogs fill the streets and parks, the outdoor cafés and shops. They keep appointments with their masseurs and acupuncturists; they sit for portraits and for readings with their astrologers. Over the objections of no less than the federal government, they romp unleashed through the delicate habitats of nearby Crissy Field. The Marina is dog country—no, dog Cannes—and no one here sees anything the least odd about it. San Francisco is home to 745,000 people and an estimated 110,000 dogs, packed into an insular fiefdom just seven miles long and seven wide. Not coincidentally, it also has the lowest ratio of children to adults of any major U.S. city: There is little doubt that dogs are helping fill a parental void—especially in the affluent Marina. “Those dogs are babied,” says retired postal carrier Spence Burton, 58, who delivered mail in the Marina for 25 years. “Even tiny apartments have, like, two rottweilers. But they're not exactly guard dogs.”

Not exactly. On a recent afternoon, Billy Franchey, 34, chauffeurs Gigi, a keeshond mix, and her “best friend” Ruby, an Australian dingo, to the neighborhood park in an electric cart for a bit of exercise. Afterward, in matching cowboy hats and sweaters, Gigi and Ruby may go to “yappy hour” at a Union Street boutique. “The Marina has a lot of young people who aren't



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married so, you know, you get a dog,” says Franchey’s girlfriend, Lisa Mobini, 29, a former NFL cheerleader. Her cell phone is loaded with pictures of Gigi

dressed as a princess for Halloween and as an angel for Christmas. “Honestly, she has a better wardrobe than I do.”

A few blocks away, astrologer Billie O’Neill pores over the star charts of Franklin, a fat Welsh corgi unwilling to share toys with his buddies in the park. “He was a warrior in all of his past lives,” she says thoughtfully. “But this life is about learning partnership and cooperation.” Perhaps it’s too much to expect him to share, really: With an ascendant water sign, Franklin’s chart indicates he is focused on “material security.”

A black Porsche glides down Chestnut Street with Slick, a seven-year-old standard poodle, regally upright in the passenger seat. Owner Sandra Ingrish takes him along on errands—to the grocery store, the bookshop, the bank—and so Slick, elegant and entitled, is a neighborhood fixture beloved by camera-toting tourists. “There are so many dogs, it’s really kind of amazing for a city this size. Dogs in New York never really looked that happy,” says Ingrish, who moved to San Francisco from Manhattan. Says Ted Rheingold, founder of *dogster.com*: “Folks here do not feel it’s abnormal to be in love with their dogs.”

But beyond canine couture and doggie day care, something unusual is happening in San Francisco. Residents are taking seriously the notion that dogs are family members, and pets are acquiring something that begins to resemble rights. The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals established the nation’s first no-kill shelter and built an adoption center with “condos” furnished with televisions and aquariums. Activists like Vanessa Getty—of San Francisco’s famed oil dynasty—run a sort of underground railroad, rescuing unwanted dogs about to be euthanized in less enlightened cities.

“San Francisco is in the vanguard,” says James Serpell, a professor of animal welfare at the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School, “but

it’s not just in San Francisco. People increasingly regard their pets as quasi persons, or honorary persons, and the laws in most places just haven’t caught up with this moral sea change.”

Leave it to the federal government to get caught in the crosscurrents. A few years ago, the National Park Service tried to enforce its requirement that dogs be kept on leashes in Crissy Field, adjacent to the Marina. There were howls of outrage, and not from the dogs. At a public meeting, some 1,500 people showed up, most angry owners. Eventually three challenged their tickets, and so far have prevailed in the courts.

“Whoa, those people can mobilize,” says Jean Donaldson, director of the SPCA’s school for dog trainers. “It’s amazing the political power dog owners have here.”

Some residents find it galling that so much attention is lavished on pets. After all, San



“It’s all about extending dogs’ lives,” says masseuse Tanya Emes (with client), who makes house calls for \$75 an hour. Her own dog, massaged daily, “is 15 and doing great.”

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"Our dogs are our babies; we never leave them home," says Lisa Mobini, at right, with Gigi. It's a concept not lost on local businesses, which cater to the young, single "doggie" crowd. Specialty biscuits (below) "are like doggie crack," says maker Linda Gordon. "We sell jillions."

Francisco is a city beset by urban woes. Homeless people wander the streets, housing is unaffordable, and public schools are struggling. One group increasingly critical of people who relate to their dogs as if they were children: parents of *real* children. "We're treating dogs better than our kids or the homeless," says city supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier. In recent years the city has seen two highly publicized dog maulings, the latest involving a boy who was fatally attacked after his mother left him alone with two pit bulls.

But animal welfare is not an either-or proposition, argues Sally Stephens, chair of the San Francisco Dog Owners Group. If dogs really are family members, then it's time they get the protections they deserve. "For a lot of people, especially singles, their family is close friends and pets," says Stephens. "For what they give, dogs deserve better."

So many trends that begin in California seem silly at first, dissonant notes in the national chorus. But then

they wash over the rest of the country, and what seemed laughable becomes inescapable. "We are on the cusp of a major change," says Serpell. On a sunny afternoon in the Marina, as they lounge at cafés, scarf treats, and fetch Frisbees, dogs may finally be getting as good as they give. □

🐾 **Welcome to Dogville** View more images of San Francisco's dog-friendly Marina district, then browse canine-lovers' websites at ngm.com/0604.

