

Cities dogged by pet lovers

In London there are as many dogs as children, in Paris dogs outnumber children.

How do cities cope with canine companions?

PARIS

STREET scene this week on the Champs-Élysées in Paris: elegant models parading the new top dog, the West Highland white terrier, rapidly replacing the Yorkshire in the upper strata of Parisian life.

Across the avenue, a smartly dressed woman enters a chic perfume store with her American cocker spaniel (another rising canine star). "May we come in?" "Certainly," gush the sales girls, who make a bigger fuss of the smaller of the two visitors.

Dog mania is everywhere in France. The 750,000 dogs in Paris outnumber the city's children; the country as a whole has nine million dogs, one for every third household, and a £2 billion a year industry supplying dog food, leads, collars and grooming, of course.

In the case of street accidents, dog ambulances with oxygen tanks take the stricken *toutou* (bow wow) to one of the 24-hour veterinary clinics where an examination with scanner can run to £175. Prudent owners take out animal hospitalisation insurance.

Letters to dog magazines, particularly from female owners, increasingly concern questions of overweight, the French obsession with *la ligne*. Some letters in *Revue Chien* and *Elle* magazines are almost interchangeable.

Dog owners are such a powerful lobby that no politician dare advocate a dog licence, and fines for fouling the streets are practically non-existent. Both the former president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and his successor, President François Mitterrand, took their dogs to photo-calls.

The dog craze is recent. A decade or so ago, dogs were largely confined to farms. Peasants moved from the countryside, while those already living in the cities became obsessed by crime prevention. Every café owner, store-keeper and taxi driver bought a guard dog. Sociologists said the French also turned to the dog for guaranteed affection as the village atmosphere of inner cities gave way to "concrete jungles".

People flout by-laws: one in five Parisians no longer keeps his dog on a leash, and more dogs accompany travellers on the Paris Métro, which is strictly forbidden.

Half a million complaints nationwide are lodged for dog bites, but the slowness of French justice means you or the dog could be dead before the case comes up.

Maitre Serge Pautot, a lawyer well known in cases involving dogs, recently defended a German shepherd dog which had killed an old age pensioner. He demanded psychiatric examination for his "client" and won the court's approval, a world first. Unfortunately for jurisprudence, the dog died before the final hearing. Even Philippe Coppé, the editor of *A Tout Chien* magazine, admits: "The problem in Paris is getting out of hand."

NEW YORK

DOGS, like almost everything else in New York city, provoke strong emotions. For some, canine companionship long ago replaced family bonds. For others, dogs represent just another intrusion on what New Yorkers like to call their "personal space".

For that reason, although there are 450,000 dogs in this city of more than seven million, dog owners are forbidden to walk their pets unleashed — even in the city parks. When a dog fouls the pavement, city law requires its owner to scoop it up.

The health department, which is responsible for dog licensing, calls the £5 annual licence fee a "bargain". New York is a "very loving place, both for people and animals", spokesman Marty Kurtz insists optimistically. But this same department attempted earlier this year to conduct a canine "final solution" against one breed of dog, the pit bull.

New Yorkers use dogs not just for companionship but for security. The most popular breed is the German shepherd, the "all-round dog", intelligent and large. The pit bull became a bit too popular with drug dealers, who prized its savagery. "It's the kind of dog that, through its training in America during the Civil War, has had a lot of positive traits bred out of it," Mr Kurtz explained.

The city government imposed draconian rules forbidding any new pit bulls being brought into New York. Those already in the city had to be sterilised and leashed and muzzled at all times. But vehement protests from dog



In Paris, the chic thing is to have a small, and pampered, terrier in tow lovers, including one group known as the Responsible Dog Owners of New York, forced the rules to be withdrawn.

LONDON

CRUELTY to dogs in Britain is at its highest level since the RSPCA began in 1824, says Gavin Grant, the society's public relations director. Of the 7.4 million dogs in Britain, between one million and 1.5 million live in Greater London. Last year there were as many dogs in the city as there

were children under the age of 15.

Every day the dogs deposit at least 130,000 gallons of urine and 150 ton of faeces in streets and parks. Westminster city council experimented with the French system of a vacuum cleaner mounted on a motor bike, but abandoned the project as being too expensive. Optimistically, most London boroughs rely on owners to carry a plastic bag and a scoop, but fines are rarely imposed if this duty is not carried out.

When owners fail in their legal obligation to keep their dogs under