

Pets Go To Final Resting Place In Style

The strains of tranquil piano music could be heard as Yuji Yabuta called the assembled company to attention.

"The Tamura family funeral service for their pet dog Chaku will now begin," he said solemnly.

The site of the service? The back of a microbus, parked in the front of their house near JR Omiya station.

Yabuta is the manager of a kind of mobile funeral parlor for bereaved families to lay to rest their dear departed Shiro and Tamas.

He had been called out to the Tamura household to lay to rest Chakuchan, the poodle, who had had the honor of being the family pet for 15 years.

The four bereaved members of the Tamura family sat in a space in the middle of the microbus to say a few prayers before the altar and say their final goodbyes to Chakuchan, lying in state in a special casket inside.

Yabuta waits for the grieving family to finish, then he takes the body, places it in the crematorium in the back section of the bus and flicks the switch.

Yabuta got into the pet cremation business four years ago when he lost the dog he had kept as a pet for many years. He had the dog's body cremated, but when he received the remains from the crematorium a few days later all sealed up in a small

urn, he wished that he had been able to "see him off."

The microbus is a nine-seater modified for the purposes of pet cremation, a world first according to Yabuta.

He uses special fuel in the cremation so that the burning bodies do not smell. Yabuta's conscientiousness and graveside manner earns him as many as 10 requests per day from people wanting him to come and lay their pets' souls to rest.

Though pet cremation is a service offered at local government facilities and by special pri-

vate businesses, Yabuta's business is the first of its kind in the capital. The whole process of cremation takes one hour, the ceremony finishing when the bereaved receive the urn with the remains of their pet inside.

"We are so thankful that we have been able to provide Chakuchan with a fitting tribute after having her living with us as part of the family for the past 15 years," said Shizue Tamura.

"Nothing can take the place of that dog in our family," she sobbed.

The 48,000 yen price tag for the

day included the ceremony, the cremation, the urn and the casket.

Shigeru Yoshida is the owner of a plot of land of around 2,600 square meters in area which used to be a pear orchard until last year when he chopped down all the trees and made the land into a memorial park, complete with chapel and crematorium made of concrete.

The cost for two years interment in one of the locker-type receptacles can be anywhere between 20,000 and 60,000 yen, depending on the size of the pet.

All the head stones for graves are in polished stone and can be purchased for 290,000 yen. There are already over 200 pets which have been "resident" at the park for over one year.

The Management and Coordination Agency conducted a survey which revealed that the number of households with pets has increased by about 35 percent in the last 15 years.

Another survey conducted by the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry has revealed that the level of production of pet food has increased by double digit percentages each year for the past few years.

If 1984 were to represent 100 units of petfood production, then industry would have produced 236 units in 1989.