

some initial resistance on the part of JR by pointing out that since they kindly allowed guide dogs in their stations it was in their own interest that the dogs were properly trained.

After-care of animals again differs from centre to centre. Ideally, rejected dogs are placed as family pets; retired dogs present a special problem since they have perhaps only three or four years to live. The Kansai centre rigorously vets families for puppy walking, rejected and retired dogs, runs seminars so that families know what to expect and what is expected of them, and also follows up after the dogs are placed. Surprisingly there is a waiting list for retired dogs. But selection, preparation and follow-up procedures are up to the discretion of each centre and it's possible less care is sometimes taken over dogs deemed no longer useful.

Human welfare not animal welfare

But what of the consumers? How do they fare in the Japanese system? First, there is no systematic promotion of guide dogs, so many blind people are not even aware dogs exist. When people discover, they will probably assume that all centres are the same and go to the nearest. Apart from the quality of dogs and training (which can vary in length from four months to a year), this may mean that varying amounts of care are taken to match the dog to the user and train the new partnership, to follow-up once the dog goes home with its new owner and provide retraining when necessary.

Another variable is the all important matter of cost. The estimated cost of producing a guide dog ranges from ¥1,500,000 to ¥2,000,000. This amount is almost never passed on to the user. Eye-Mate, for example, charges a 'token' ¥150,000 as a 'pride fee' on the grounds that users prefer not to feel they are receiving charity. Dogs from the Kansai Guide Dogs association are free. But dogs may be sold at approaching their real cost if they are to be provided through another prefecture or organisation, or in some cases, even to individual users. Consumers are only really able to evaluate the consequences of their centre's philosophy as they start to live with their dog. But users are beginning to vote with their feet second time around by getting a replacement dog from a different centre, even if it means going to the other side of Japan.

Some centres have much more rigid requirements for guide dog ownership than others. Some will provide dogs only to the totally blind, on the grounds that people with some sense of light and dark will never trust or rely on the dog completely. Others believe that dogs should be given wherever the quality and enjoyment of the user's walking can be improved. There may also be upper and lower age limits, for example, users should be between 18 and 60 in one case. Naturally this curtails overall guide dog use and is utterly foreign to Sam Tawada, who has only ever refused three people, all on grounds of illness. When I visited the centre, he was interviewing a 64-year-old *koto* teacher, a glaucoma victim since the age of 18. In such cases, physical mobility and balance are more important criteria than age and, in spite of a knee problem, aggravated by her kneeling at the *koto*, Tawada saw no insuperable barriers to her using a dog. Nevertheless, she may have to wait a further two years. The centre produced 12 dogs last year and expects to produce 17 and 20

respectively in 1992 and 93, but all these dogs are already spoken for.

The Shirahama centre turns out about 20 dogs a year and altogether, the eight training centres produce up to a 100 dogs annually, usually between 80 and 90. But the number of visually impaired is growing by 20,000 a year. So even if everyone knew about guide dogs, and those who fulfilled the requirements were prepared to accept dogs with the shortest training, the problem would still remain: there wouldn't be enough guide dogs to go round.

Animals as a way of life

A major obstacle the Japanese guide dog movement has had to face has been the general attitude to animals, as shown by the public at large and the legislature in particular. In the first place, people and government have been slow to accept the integration of the visually disabled into mainstream society which translates into the right of blind people to lead as normal a life as possible. Kiyoshi Hibino points out that all improvements in facilities and services for the visually impaired have been initiated and brought about by the blind lobby, not national government. Even the rather impressive braille tiles (made by the blind themselves) misfire rather because there is no national policy governing what they signify. For example in one city, they may designate a central, safe area for movement, in another they may signify danger, such as proximity to a railway track. So blind people travelling from, say, Osaka to Kobe (Hyogo Prefecture) have to sort out the ambiguity for themselves.

Only in 1970, when guide dogs entered the Diet building alongside their masters for the first time in history, was legislation repealed thus allowing blind people to travel on the national railway without an advance permit.

Guide dogs are now accepted on all trains and buses and have been recognised, since 1971, as an alternative to a white cane for pedestrians by the Road Traffic Act. Since 1974, they have been allowed on the three major airlines without having to wear a muzzle. However, whereas in America and Australia guide dogs must be allowed entry to all public places by law, in Japan and the U.K. there is no legislation to enforce this. In Britain, this seems to work: in Japan, it clearly doesn't.

Many people are afraid of dogs: Eye-Mate finds it necessary to state in their advice 'How to communicate with Eye-Mate users', "Don't make a fuss or be scared because Eye-Mates are trained not to bark or bite." In general, dogs in public places are regarded as a menace (as indeed they can be when badly trained). Above all, the Japanese concept of a pet has traditionally been that, whether dog or cat, they don't belong inside. As Sam Tawada puts it, "The Japanese *keep* dogs, they don't *live with* them. Even sighted people don't know how to live with dogs." Two aspects of Japanese housing, limited space and tatami matting further discourage allowing dogs in the home.

Sired by K9 out of star Wars?

Given all this, it was perhaps to be expected that the Japanese would try an approach with which they were more familiar — a technological solution. Research was apparently started on a robot, MELDOG, (Mechanical Electronic Dog?). An air of derision colours Sam Tawada's response to the project, which he thinks has now been abandoned. "In the first place, it couldn't go upstairs and it would probably have required complete remodeling of the environment it could operate it but — most important of all — it never wagged its tail!"

So the Japanese visually impaired are forced to resort to the real thing. Dog users are taught during their four-week training course how to care for and exercise their animals (One devout dog loves going to church — it is allowed to run free around the church after the service. Technically, any dog running free anywhere, even around the training centres, is breaking the law.)

However, when users leave the centre they have to face numerous examples of ignorance and prejudice, particularly in the service industry. In 1973, the Environment Agency sent out guidelines to hotels and inns requesting 'co-operation' in accommodating guide dogs. Similar government instructions were issued to restaurants, coffee shops, *senso* and other public facilities in 1974. Yet about half of the Kameoka-trained dog users have been refused entry to places and this remains a major problem.

There is as yet no distinction in Japanese minds between guide dogs and ordinary pets. Guide dogs are not pets. They are professional animals whose job it is to accompany their masters 24 hours a day to provide sight. Nevertheless, people clearly don't understand the dog's importance to its master and often ask that it be tied up somewhere outside. In



The Kansai Guide Dogs Association Training Centre near Kameoka

hotels, shops and restaurants, dogs seem to be considered dirty or annoying and users are told not bring them near other customers or guests. According to one user, while only a few businesses flatly refuse to serve him, many raise initial objections, which must be argued, or worse, use a subtle approach, more difficult to combat: he will be told the hotel is full (when it isn't), his room cannot be cleaned and so on. Hibino, himself a guide dog user, plays down the anti-guide dog bias of restaurants and hotels, saying that the main culprits these days are traditional Japanese inns and the like. While he is certainly correct when he says that things have improved dramatically, a brief tel-

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