



BOBAJI: THE SIDECAR DOG

The 'Neutered and Lovin' It Tour' promotes shelter pet adoptions through joy, not pity.

BY ROXANNE HAWN

Van Frederick's life went wonky a few years ago. He left his home in Seattle and traveled to the East Coast, staying with family members and searching for a new, more creative way of life. When an aunt in Maryland needed a house-sitter while she went abroad in late 2005, Frederick agreed to watch things, including an unruly Labrador named Beau. That decision changed everything and spurred a cross-country adventure aimed at showing people how great life is with a dog always at your side.

BACKSTORY

Beau lived a backyard life, where his entertainment came from tearing things up, so Frederick rollerbladed alongside the energetic dog. He taught him to catch a Frisbee. He took him places, just for fun. "He had such a yearning to please, to play, to interact. Our chance meeting probably saved us both from deep despair," says Frederick, adding in *Forrest Gump* style, "That's all I have to say about that."

A couple months later when Frederick's aunt returned, he says, "We were one person. All his behavior issues went away. I had to tell her, 'I'm sorry, but he's coming with me.'"

Frederick thought Beau had excessive vowels, so he called him Bo instead. Then, to note the dog's honored status and in memory of the trip to India that spurred their meeting, he added a Hindi term of respect (ji) to the end—kind of like calling him "Mr. Bo." Somehow, that morphed into Bobaji (pronounced BO-bah-gee).

TRAVELS

Frederick developed a cross-country tour promoting shelter pet adoption. In his mind, it's the same motivation as the ASPCA's TV ads with Sarah McLachlan, except rather than



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SIDECAR

Frederick loves three other things in life: motorcycles, music and baseball. Because he loves Bo more than motorcycles, the two usually traveled in a truck. When gas prices got high, Frederick found a sidecar, fixed it up with a baseball theme and asked Bo to hop inside. "The transformation was mind-boggling. He jumped right in. He has been in that sidecar ever since. We've gone 27,000 miles so far," Frederick says. "People ask me how I trained him to stay in there, but I didn't. He just loves it so much."



pity, Frederick wants to inspire action through joy. "I knew I had something people loved to see and something that brought smiles to their faces," says Frederick, a former Microsoft consultant who also worked for many years in Europe, including as professional musician and street performer. "One of the reasons I have the video cameras is not just to capture Bo, but rather to capture people's reactions."

He sold his home in Seattle to generate start-up funds and has already spent \$80,000 on the project. He bought an RV, with a garage space in the back for the bike, and set out with Bo and their two cats.

"I really want to get to know the places we go," he says. "I don't just want to go from town to town and stay in some motel. I want to get to know people. The RV is the perfect solution."

They've been to nine states up and down the East Coast so far. Together, they've played Frisbee and met thousands of people on beaches in Florida, Central Park in New York City, the mall in Washington, D.C. and the parking lots at several Major League Baseball stadiums, including during the 2008 World Series in Philadelphia.


CAUSE

Frederick and Bo host events during their stops to educate people about pet overpopulation, puppy mills and the many great

pets available for adoption around the country. They'd love to do more and continually seek bookings and tour sponsors.

They also give impromptu performances in public places. Their shtick includes piped-in music played from the sidecar's speakers and Bo playing straight man to Frederick's antics. "I've written several really good, very entertaining songs about dogs that people are going to love," he says.

Even famous people take note. Outside the Florida Marlins' spring training camp in 2008, Frederick waited in hopes of getting a second base from the field crew. "I thought home plate at first," he says, with a giggle, "but that wouldn't work. Bo would never stand at home plate to hit because he doesn't have opposable thumbs, but he could pinch run."

Three guys came out to see Bo, and when kids ran up and asked for autographs, Frederick realized one of the Marlins was outfielder Luis Gonzalez. After he and Gonzalez chatted, Frederick asked the player to sign one of Bo's baseballs. The autograph reads: "To Bo, a true champ." 

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