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HOME-OFFICE FURNITURE • INDOOR STORAGE



A Breed Apart

THE LATEST GEAR FOR YOUR DOG OR CAT

CARRIERS * BEDS * CRATES & KENNELS * LEASHES * SEAT BELTS

By Sandy Robins

It's said that necessity is the mother of invention. If so, the pet-products industry now very well might be considered the big daddy of innovative ideas. Take, for example, leashes that hold nothing back and pet beds that are anything but sleepy.

The key questions: How much of the buzz about innovations is accurate, and how much is just marketing hype that's geared to line the pockets of an industry that already rakes in some \$12 billion annually? How much of the promotional information is written to evoke a response from the pet "mothers" and "fathers" among us?

It's "pet humanization" that's fueling the industry, concedes Bob Vetere, who is the president and chief operating officer of American Pet Products Association. The more that we consider our pets to be family members and make them a bigger part of our lives, the more that it increases our need for products to allow us to lead "active lifestyles and ensure that Fluffy and Spike are well taken care of," Vetere says.

Over the past 10 years, "pet humanization" has helped consumers to believe that products now exist on the market that allow people to have a pet who didn't think they had the time to have a pet.

Author and investigative journalist Michael Schaffer, who spent months sniffing doggedly around the industry as he researched his book "One Nation Under Dog," further explains the reason for this new wave of innovation. We apply the same instincts to caring for and nurturing our pets as we do for our children, he says.

"Will a new kind of leash or food bowl or dog bed make it easier to have a pet? Sure. Is there also junk out there designed to separate fools from their money? Sure. . . . People should apply the same standards as they do to other products." Namely, consumers should ask, is this a good product, convenient and worth the money?

He adds, "The one thing we know is that dogs and cats don't care about whether something is stylish."

NOT ON A SHORT LEASH. Pet owner Sean Cox can't disguise his enthusiasm when he talks about his black Labrador/Doberman mix, Kaya.

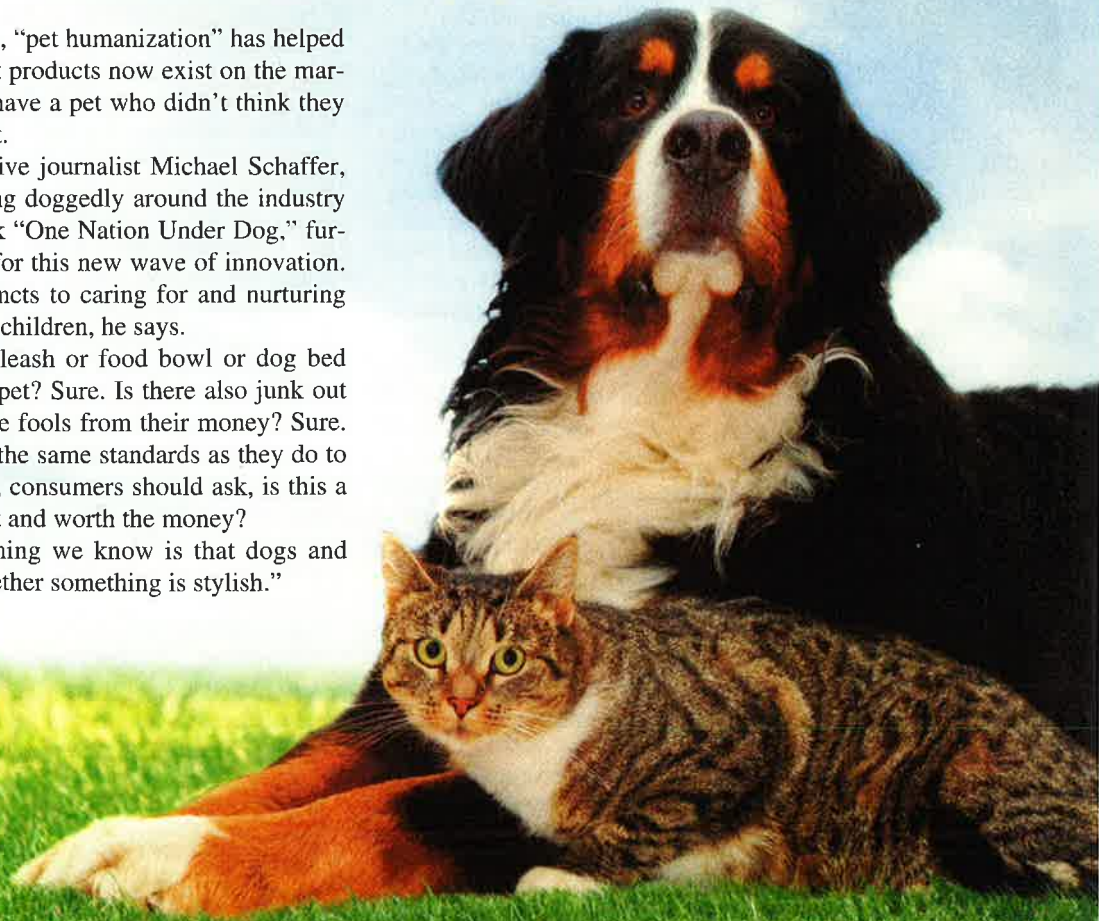
"She's my 'daughter,'" Cox gushes. "We go everywhere together." Both go hiking and duck-hunting and enjoy the outdoors together, so Cox spent a lot of time to find a strong leash.

He decided on a leash that has a handle and D-rings that allow him to shorten the leash, tie it to a pole or hook it onto his belt for hands-free use.

"This leash had all [the] functions with a quick click, and it really worked for us," Cox says.

Some of the latest models to be unleashed by manufacturers have built-in extras, such as a flashlight, a dispenser for waste bags or wipes and a compartment to hold the scooped poop. Fortunately, we found that these multifunctional leashes are priced competitively against what you'd spend for an ordinary leash and the separate accessories.

Harrison Forbes, who trains all types of canines, from working dogs in police and military organizations, to celeb-



rity pooches, says "I like [the idea of] having practical things, like flashlights and poop-bag holders . . . on the leash."

Forbes points out that other new takes on leashes help to address the pet's behavioral issues. This includes the ThunderLeash (\$30), which pet-products manufacturer ThunderShirt introduced in April 2013 to relieve pet stress and anxiety with its swaddling effect. The leash has hardware that allows the owner to wrap it around the midsection of the dog.

The leash is a "modern improvement on an old training trick called the Dutch half hitch," Forbes says, "that puts an extra loop on the a leash around the flank or belly." Tightening the loop helps to distract and settle "an overactive or leash-aggressive dog that may pull hard or become very agitated at the sight of other animals or strangers. . . . Even a 20 percent anxiety reduction can put a pet in a new mindset" that might allow a pet to conquer its fear slowly.



OUTSIDE THE BOX. By the same token, kennels and carriers aren't simply kennels or carriers anymore either.

Ann Hanson, who is the director of marketing and innovation for Pet-

mate, tells Consumers Digest that her company and other manufacturers have modified the design of their kennels and carriers based on a belief that pets spend more time as a part of all family activities, both inside of the home and on the road. This latter claim appears to be legitimate: The word from Jet Blue Airways and United Airlines is that the number of pets that travel continues to rise. Also, the latest annual AAA Pet Book includes at least 14,000 pet-friendly accommodations nationwide. In 2001, it had 10,000.

New designs in carriers offer 360-degree ventilation and access from the top, which is useful particularly for cats, because they can be difficult to "load." Meanwhile, an easy-to-operate, multiposition divider panel in Petmate's Navigator line of plastic kennels allows the pet owner to limit space when an animal is young and expand the kennel as the pet grows, which eliminates the cost of purchasing multiple plastic kennels from

Best Buys in Pet Carriers and Crates & Kennels

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



Best Buys in pet carriers and crates & kennels were selected based on quality of construction, features and performance.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time for the smallest version of the model and is subject to change.



Sherpa Original Deluxe

PET CARRIERS

[P] Sleepypod

MSRP: \$180; Best Price: \$167

>> The circular, dome-shape design of the Sleepypod is unique among models that we found and strikes us as the most conducive to permitting a dog or a cat to relax in a natural, curled-up sleeping position. Not only does the top-loading design make it easier to place a resistant pet inside, but it also unzips to convert the pet carrier into a nicely plush pet bed. The 1680-denier ballistic nylon that's used in the construction of the pet carrier is among the strongest grades of ballistic nylon that's used in the construction of luggage. Unfortunately, this model isn't designed for approval for airline travel.

Features:

- * Size: 17 in. (diam.) x 13-1/2 in. (h)
- * Airline-passenger-compartment compatible: No

- * Colors: Black, blue, brown, pink, red, white
- * Warranty: 1 yr.

[M] Sherpa Original Deluxe

MSRP: \$63-\$84; Best Price: \$40

>> The Original Deluxe, which is a repeat Best Buy selection, delivers exceptional value for a soft-shell pet carrier. No other pet carrier that's at this price can match this model's warranty and variety of sizes. Add to this the top and side entry, ventilation on three sides, locking zippers, a machine-washable liner and Sherpa's Guaranteed-on-Board program, which guarantees full reimbursement for the cost of your airline ticket should you be denied boarding because of the pet carrier.

Features:

- * Sizes:
 - 15 in. (l) x 10 in. (w) x 8-1/2 in. (h);
 - 17 in. (l) x 11 in. (w) x 10-1/2 in. (h);
 - 19 in. (l) x 11-3/4 in. (w) x 11-1/2 in. (h)
- * Airline-passenger-compartment

compatible: Yes

- * Colors: Black, brown, gray, plum
- * Warranty: 1 yr.

[E] Kurgo Wander

MSRP: \$50; Best Price: \$45

>> No other soft-sided pet carrier that we found that's in this price range is as sturdy as the Wander is. This sturdiness is important, because you don't want your pet to suffer the discomfort of lying in a well. Plus, this model delivers features that are provided in more-expensive pet carriers, including a substantial, padded removable liner, an interior tether for an optional harness, and practical-size pockets. We also like that the liner is fleece on one side and nylon on the other to account for cold and warm conditions, as well as the model's lifetime warranty.

Features:

- * Size: 17 in. (l) x 12 in. (w) x 11 in. (h)
- * Airline-passenger-compartment compatible: Yes
- * Color: Black/khaki/orange
- * Warranty: Lifetime

puppy/kittenhood to adulthood. Dividers typically were found only in metal crates.

Twenty-four years ago, Gayle Martz, who is a former flight attendant, revolutionized the pet-travel industry by designing the Sherpa, which was the first airline-industry-approved, in-cabin pet carrier. The latest Sherpa models can be fitted with a module that plays classical music. The goal is to reduce anxiety and stress for pets on a trip to the vet, an airline flight or a road trip.

"Music definitely helps," says Nicholas Dodman, who is the head of the Animal Behavior Department of Clinical Sciences at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University. For a pet that's sitting alone in a carrier and that can't see properly out of it, "and there is the banging and clanking of car doors . . . music, if nothing else, would be white noise to mask some of these disturbing sounds and, in fact, has a soothing, relaxing effect. I think it's a good idea."

It isn't appropriate for dogs only. Marilyn Krieger, who is a certified cat behavior consultant and the author of the book "Naughty No More! Change Unwanted Behaviors Through Positive Reinforcement," agrees with Dodman. "I often suggest that my cat behavior clients play soft music to their cats . . . to help calm them. Based on my own and my clients' experiences, specific types of classical music appear to help lessen cat's anxiety and stress. The most effective music for reducing stress is slow, in the moderate ranges and not played loudly."

BEDTIME STORIES. As a result of innovation in pet health care, pets are living longer than ever before, and a large percentage of pets are considered seniors (over the age of 7 years). Thus, makers of pet beds are designing products that they claim will go beyond providing just a place to snooze to appeal to owners of our furry senior citizens.

"The state-of-the-art medical advancements for pets over the past 10–15 years has made pet lovers and owners more aware of pet accessories out there that can benefit their pets, such as memory-foam mattresses," says Dr. Oliver Morgan, who is an orthopedic surgeon at Cornell University Veterinary Specialists.

Morgan finds value in such mattresses. Supportive beds, such as those that are made from the memory foam that's used in pillows and mattress tops that are made for people, definitely benefit pets both post-surgery and in helping to prevent trauma, irritation and pressure sores in chronic orthopedic conditions, he says.

Although memory-foam technology isn't new, it's new to the pet industry and is in high demand, concurs Gregory Jemal of G. Mason Group, which manufactures pet beds that use this technology. As a result, the reach of memory-foam pet beds is expanding rapidly.

CRATES & KENNELS

[P] Petmate Navigator

MSRP: \$40–\$225; Best Price: \$32

>> No other plastic kennel that we found has an adjustable divider to permit use from puppy/kittenhood to adult. We also like the unique dial latches, because they require the pet owner to turn the dial twice to secure the kennel door. This is an improvement over the simpler latches that other kennels have, which we believe can be mistaken for being locked too easily. No other plastic kennel that we found on the market has 360-degree ventilation.

Features:

* Sizes:

- 19 in. (l) x 12-3/4 in. (w) x 11-1/2 in. (h);
- 24-2/3 in. (l) x 16-11/12 in. (w) x 15 in. (h);
- 28 in. (l) x 20 in. (w) x 19-1/4 in. (h);
- 32 in. (l) x 21 in. (w) x 23 in. (h);
- 36 in. (l) x 23-1/3 in. (w) x 26-3/4 in. (h);
- 40 in. (l) x 26 in. (w) x 29-3/4 in. (h)

* Color: Brown/tan

* Warranty: 1 yr.

[M] MidWest Ovation Trainer Double Door

MSRP: \$67–\$164; Best Price: \$42

>> The Ovation Trainer Double Door includes the company's exclusive hybrid double-door configuration, which combines a swing-out front door and a side door that swings up to rest atop the crate. This makes nearly limitless the locations in which you can place the crate. We found the operation of the swing-up door easy because of the design of the track mechanism. Dog owners who have to move the crate regularly between multiple residences, for example, will find the no-tools-required assembly, fold-flat capability and snap-on handle of excellent benefit.

Features:

* Sizes:

- 25-3/4 in. (l) x 18 in. (w) x 19-11/12 in. (h);
- 30-11/12 in. (l) x 19-11/12 in. (w) x 21-1/2 in. (h);

- 36-11/12 in. (l) x 23-3/16 in. (w) x 24-3/4 in. (h);
- 42-11/12 in. (l) x 29-3/16 in. (w) x 30-11/12 in. (h);
- 48-11/12 in. (l) x 30-3/4 in. (w) x 32-3/4 in. (h)

* Color: Black

* Warranty: 1 yr.

[E] MidWest iCrate Single Door

MSRP: \$34–\$199;

Best Price: \$19

>> The iCrate Single Door which is a repeat Best Buy selection, is the best entry-level steel crate that we found. It has many of the same features as MidWest's more expensive crates have, such as fold-and-carry construction and a composite plastic pan. Unlike other economy models, this crate has a dividing panel that lets you expand the crate as your pet grows. **Double Door** models (\$38–\$156), which add a side door, are also Best Buys.



Petmate Navigator

Features:

* Sizes:

- 18 in. (l) x 12 in. (w) x 14 in. (h);
- 22 in. (l) x 13 in. (w) x 16 in. (h);
- 24 in. (l) x 18 in. (w) x 19 in. (h);
- 30 in. (l) x 19 in. (w) x 21 in. (h);
- 36 in. (l) x 23 in. (w) x 25 in. (h);
- 42 in. (l) x 28 in. (w) x 30 in. (h);
- 48 in. (l) x 30 in. (w) x 33 in. (h)

* Color: Black

* Warranty: 1 yr.

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 66.

We aren't surprised by this, because memory foam is being used to catch the eye of consumers in plenty of categories beyond mattresses—flip-flops, innersoles for shoes, and bras, among the latest.

So when it comes to pet beds, how does the consumer discern the benefits that are delivered from an individual product from the buzz? Unfortunately, it seems impossible at this point.

Manufacturers of mattresses often promote the thickness of the memory foam that's used in their products. That's the exception to the rule among makers of pet beds. Memory foam usually has to be 2 inches or, optimally, 3 inches thick to deliver the comfort characteristics that it's best known to supply, Jemal says, referring to support and cushioning.

However, Dan Schecter of Carpenter, which produces memory foam for mattresses and pet beds, says the pet-products industry often buys remnants. The remnants can come in the form of sheets or as "bits and pieces," he says, but he



Ruff Rider Roadie Canine Travel Restraint

doesn't believe that such remnants deliver the same quality as a big sheet provides. "A bigger sheet allows you to put on a pattern, called a *convolute*, and that adds attributes to the foam," increasing the level of comfort and support. This is how mattresses that are meant for people are constructed.

Further, pet-bed manufacturers often combine memory foam with other inserts in their beds, such as polyester that's made from recycled bottles, as well as gel inserts and other types of foam. In many cases, the mere fact that the label touts memory foam doesn't in any way convey to the consumer whether it's a pedigreed memory-foam bed, so to speak, or a mixed breed. We found that many manufacturers of pet beds are tight-lipped about the type of memory-foam content of their products—even in cases in which a memory-foam pet bed is sold under a brand that's associated with a manufacturer of a memory-foam mattress for people.

Further, we found that a high price—some cost several hundred dollars—doesn't necessarily attest to better memory foam on the inside.

Also aimed at owners of senior pets are new beds that have built-in heating pads or cooling systems. Morgan gives them a stamp of approval. A heating pad or cold-gel pad offers pet owners

Best Buys in Pet Beds

Best Buy Categories

- [P]—Premium selection
- [M]—Midrange selection
- [E]—Economy selection



Best Buys in pet beds were selected based on quality of construction, features, performance and warranty.

Most pet beds don't have a warranty. Unless otherwise noted, Best Buy selections in those categories carry a guarantee against defects in the manufacture of the product.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time for the smallest version of the model and is subject to change.

PET BEDS

[P] Harry Barker Hemp Stripe Rectangle

MSRP: \$150–\$190;
Best Price: \$128

>> Superb quality of construction set the Hemp Stripe Rectangle apart from all of the models that

we found. This begins with a channel-quilted insert, which is unique among models that we assessed. It and a 5-inch gusset stop the filler material from moving around under the weight of the dog, which helps the pet bed to hold its shape. A high-quality zipper allows easy removal of the cover for machine washing.

Features:

- * Sizes: 20 in. (l) x 26 in. (w) x 5 in. (h); 29 in. (l) x 36 in. (w) x 5 in. (h); 36 in. (l) x 44 in. (w) x 5 in. (h)
- * Colors: Blue, brown, green, natural (beige), orange, red
- * Cleaning: Machine-washable cover, spot-clean insert

[M] West Paw Design Bumper Bed

MSRP: \$69–\$169; Best Price: \$69

>> The Bumper Bed's combination of superior quality and color options is unmatched among pet



Precision Pet Snoozzy Pillow-Soft Daydreamer

beds. Unlike most other doughnut-style dog beds, this repeat Best Buy model comes in a wide range of sizes. The **Bumper Bed with Organic Cotton** (\$79–\$189) and the **Bumper Bed with Hemp** (\$70–\$190) are also Best Buys.

Features:

- * Sizes: 18 in. (l) x 16 in. (w) x 6 in. (h); 23 in. (l) x 20 in. (w) x 7 in. (h); 30 in. (l) x 25 in. (w) x 9 in. (h); 36 in. (l) x 32 in. (w) x 9 in. (h); 43 in. (l) x 36 in. (w) x 9 in. (h)
- * Colors: 7 bolster, 11 center
- * Cleaning: Machine washable
- * Warranty: 30 days

[E] Precision Pet Snoozzy Pillow-Soft Daydreamer

MSRP: \$50–\$90;
Best Price: \$35

>> The Snoozzy Pillow-Soft Daydreamer is a repeat Best Buy selection and is a terrific pet bed for the price because of its structural features. Its excellent padding provides good body comfort as well as support for the pet's neck and head on the bed's bolstered section. These models have bump chenille covers.

Features:

- * Sizes: 21 in. (l) x 19 in. (w) x 9-1/2 in. (h); 26 in. (l) x 22 in. (w) x 10 in. (h); 32 in. (l) x 25 in. (w) x 10-1/2 in. (h);
- * Colors: Brown, Dark Rust (reddish brown), green
- * Cleaning: Machine washable
- * Warranty: 1 yr.

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 66.

“an easy way to deliver heat or cold sources,” he says, “especially when you are dealing with a chronic condition . . . on a daily basis and, sometimes, several times a day.”

LIKE FAMILY. As the innovation in pet products continues to mirror the lifestyle trends of pet owners, the industry has moved into what independent pet-industry consultant Mike Dillon, who

is the author of the report “Pet Industry Strategic Outlook,” calls the integration phase. Major companies that focused only on products for people now are crossing over to cater to furry customers, too. Anyone interested in a pet blow dryer, for example?

What does this development mean for the consumer who shops for his/her canine or feline family member? Obviously, it means a lot more choice. Of

course, a lot more wariness, too. ◀

Sandy Robins has reported on pets and pet products since 2003 for publications such as Cat Fancy and Modern Dog and on MSNBC.com and Today.com. She wrote the books “Fabulous Felines: Health and Beauty Secrets for the Pampered Cat” and “For the Love of Cats” and is the recipient of the 2013 Excellence in Journalism and Outstanding Contributions to the Pet Industry Award.

Best Buys in Leashes & Seat Belts

Best Buy Categories

[P]=Premium selection

[M]=Midrange selection

[E]=Economy selection



SEE PAGE 72

Best Buys in leashes and seat belts were selected based on quality of construction, features, performance and warranty.

Best Price is a reflection of the lowest retail price that was available at press time for the shortest or smallest version of the model and is subject to change.

LEASHES

[M] Flexi Retractable

MSRP: \$19–\$67; *Best Price*: \$19

>> Flexi’s leashes remain the best value in retractable leashes that are on the market. A repeat Best Buy selection, the Retractable model has the smoothest retracting action of any such leash that we examined. It comes either corded or belted and is available in an array of styles. We particularly like the **Durabelt** versions, which include the only retractable leash that we found that’s for dogs up to 150 pounds, and the **Reflect** versions, with their neon cord that the company claims is visible at a distance of 1,000 feet. Other lines that are also



Flexi Retractable

Best Buys are the **City, Coffee, Explore, Expression, Fashion, Freedom** and **Hawaiian**. All versions come with a lifetime warranty.

Features:

- * Lengths: 10 ft., 16 ft.
- * Materials: Plastic case, nylon belt or cord
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[M] Kurgo Quantum

MSRP: \$20; *Best Price*: \$20

>> The multifunctional Quantum is fitted with a carabiner (D-ring) and loops along the length of the leash to permit easy adjustment from as long as 6 feet down to 3 feet. It also transforms into a shoulder or waist leash, which permits you to walk hands free. Also, a simple adjustment of the carabiner produces a double leash to walk two dogs.

Features:

- * Length: 3–6 ft.
- * Material: Nylon
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[E] Lupine Padded Handle Lead

MSRP: \$9.99–\$16.99;

Best Price: \$9.99

>> No other leash that’s in this price range can match the quality and variety of choices in color, pattern and size of the Padded Handle Lead model, which is a repeat Best Buy selection. The manufacturer promises that it will replace its leash even if your pet chews it—a guarantee that no other manufacturer makes.

Features:

- * Lengths: 2 ft., 4 ft., 6 ft.
- * Materials: High-tensile nylon, polyester handle
- * Warranty: Lifetime

SEAT BELTS

[P] Ruff Rider Roadie Canine

Travel Restraint

MSRP: \$43–\$54; *Best Price*: \$43

>> The Ruff Rider Roadie Canine Travel Restraint provides the best selection of sizes—seven, from extra small to extra large—among models that we found. The pleated, step-in design fits over the chest and is said to prevent chaffing on the body. It also can be put over the dog’s head, which can be important for people for whom it would be difficult to stoop low to fit the seat belt over a dog’s chest. A dog can either sit or lie down. Unfortunately, this model doesn’t permit movement across the back seat or cargo area, which is important on longer trips. The device is made from nylon webbing that’s said to exceed Society of Automotive Engineers tensile-strength standards for seat belts for people.

Features:

- * Sizes: 7
- * Warranty: 1 yr.

[M] Kurgo Enhanced Strength Tru-Fit Smart

MSRP: \$25; *Best Price*: \$18

>> The solid design and construction of the easy-to-adjust Enhanced Strength Tru-Fit Smart harness includes all-steel nesting buckles and five adjustment points. A broad, padded chest



Kurgo Enhanced Strength Tru-Fit Smart

plate provides extra comfort. A dog can either sit or lie down. A seat-belt tether is included.

Features:

- * Sizes: 5
- * Warranty: Lifetime

[M] Kurgo Auto Zip Line/Petco Dog Zipline Tether

MSRP: \$22; *Best Price*: \$20

>> This repeat Best Buy selection still is the only product of its kind. The Auto Zip Line/Dog Zipline Tether lets your safely belted pet move back and forth across the back seat of your vehicle. The system can be attached to the handles of the rear doors, the seat-belt buckles of the rear seat or to any D-ring system that’s in an SUV cargo area. The system accommodate up to two large dogs.

Features:

- * Size: 1
- * Warranty: Lifetime

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 66.