

BARKING UP THE WRONG CHRISTMAS TREE

Eight in 10 pet owners intend to give their furry friends more than just a bone for Christmas - gifting them advent calendars, jumpers and jackets, cooking them animal friendly festive feasts and taking them along to meals out.

A survey of 2,000 cat and dog owners found 23 per cent have bought their pet more presents than their partner this year – totalling an average spend of £31.30.

While 15 per cent will research a Christmas meal fit for a king in a bid to spoil their pet with their favourite animal friendly Christmas meal, alongside their own turkey roast.

A hopeful 13 per cent have even bought their pet a festive jumper to wear on the big day, though just 38 per cent of these think they will wear it willingly.

And 35 per cent think their cat or dog would have some reservations about donning a novelty Santa hat.

Neil Rogers from M&S Pet Insurance which commissioned the research, said: "The results of our study show that we're willing to go the extra mile for our furry friends.

"Christmas is a time to treat the ones we love, and to show our family and friends how much they mean to us.

"It's great to see that our pets, who bring us so much joy day-to-day, are included in this special time of the year."

The research also found 75 per cent see their cat or dog as a key member of the family.

A resounding 79 per cent of pet owners get joy out of seeing their furry companion happy and living their best lives.

Other treats pets can expect this Christmas include a new bed, a nice collar and new toys.

Yet despite wanting to spoil their four-legged companion with wrapped presents and even a pet-friendly tippie, 31 per cent do not have pet insurance in the event that anything should happen to their beloved friend.

The top reason for not purchasing pet insurance is the perceived cost of the policy.

Others feel like they just won't need a pet insurance policy, and 15 per cent believe it is too complicated to set their pets up with coverage.

Research from the Association of British Insurers has revealed that the average veterinary bill (for any animal in 2021) costs £848.

The study found that, in the event of such a bill, just 51 per cent of pet owners would be in a comfortable position to pay it.

This could be a concern to pet families, as the study also found 45 per cent of pet owners have faced an unexpected pet emergency in the past.

The average pet family will have three unexpected vet bills on average over the course of their pet's lifetime, totting up to £344.

Neil Rogers, added: "Taking out insurance – and selecting a policy that's right for you and your pet – can provide peace of mind for pet owners."

"This is especially worth considering at this time of year, when there are often more potential pet hazards around the home, like baubles, tinsel, chocolates, candy canes and more."

Kirsty, Head Nurse at vetfone, shares her top tips for keeping your pet safe this Christmas:

- **Festive foods to avoid** - Traditional Christmas treats like chocolate, mince pies, Christmas cake and nuts are harmful to dogs and cats so try to keep them hidden. The same goes for presents under the tree containing food - even the best-behaved pet can be tempted to investigate!
- **Feeling thirsty?** - Don't let your pet drink the water from the base of the Christmas tree - Fertiliser in the soil means it could be harmful
- **Prickly paws** - Real Christmas trees are well known for shedding their needles as soon as you bring them home, check your pet's paws regularly to make sure no pesky pines have become stuck in there
- **Festive foliage** - Many of the plants we bring into our homes at this time of year can be problematic for our pets. Any poinsettia, holly, mistletoe and ivy should be kept out of your pet's reach to ensure they aren't tempted to take a closer look
- **Look but don't touch** - Our pets are curious creatures and love to investigate things, and not surprisingly, are often tempted to play with tinsel and baubles during the festive period. However, if ingested, they can cause blockages and make your pet very unwell, so be sure to keep them away from playful paws

TOP FESTIVE TREATS FOR BRIT PETS:

1. A new toy
2. Some new treats
3. Presents properly wrapped up so they can open them with the family
4. A night cuddled up watching a festive film
5. They join us to eat Christmas dinner as a family
6. A new bed
7. A new collar
8. Cooking them a special, animal friendly, Christmas dinner
9. An advent calendar
10. A Christmas jumper
11. A new winter jacket for cold walks
12. A Christmas card
13. Pet-friendly tippie
14. A trip away to a pet-friendly location
15. Bringing them to a Christmas meal out