

By SARAH CLARKE

Getting Fat Freddy into shape again

“I’m sorry, Mrs Jones, as I’ve told you before, Freddy is clinically obese. He needs to be put on a diet and start a fitness programme without delay. If you don’t do something about it, his future will probably include high blood pressure, skin complaints, diabetes, joint pain, even infertility. I know how difficult it can be to get youngsters to exercise and diet but you really must act soon. I’ve put together a pack of information to help you get Freddy into shape.”

With obesity rates rising across the Middle East, this could be a conversation between a doctor and patient at any hospital or clinic across Bahrain. In reality, Freddy is a dog, unable to walk because his owner almost loved him to death; showering him with affection and food and apparently forgetting to exercise him.

As a result, when Freddy turned up at Tony the Dogfather’s refuge he was a little barrel and covered in sores. He’s a spaniel of some sort but you wouldn’t know it and until he slims down and grows his fur again his exact breed will remain a mystery.

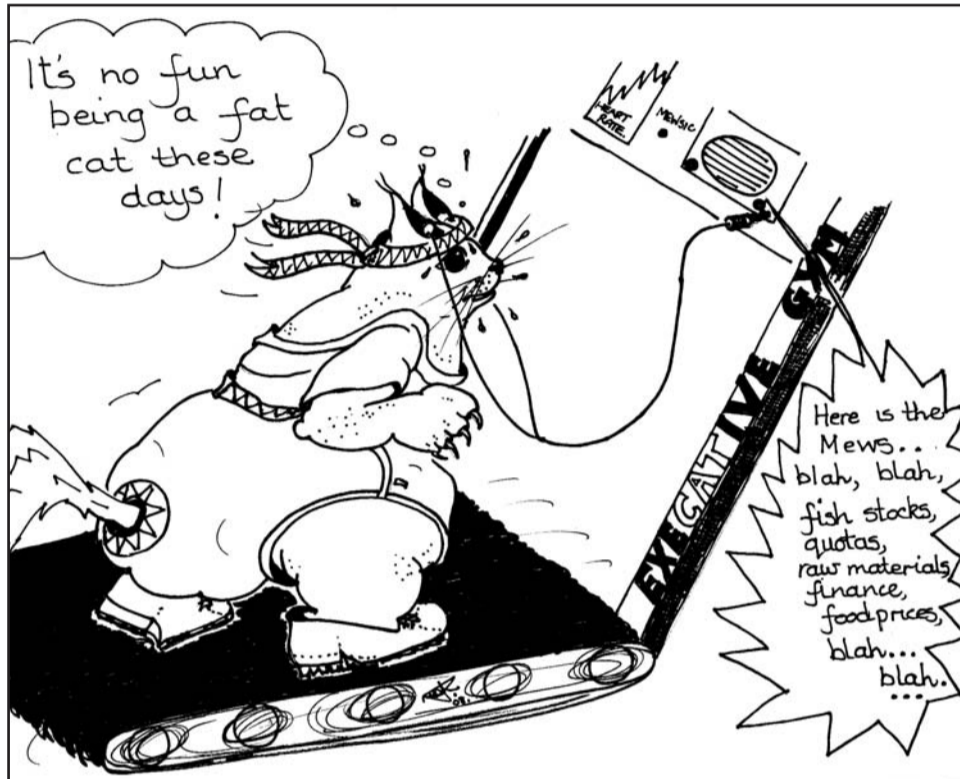
How could Freddy have got into this mess? Simple: Too much food, not enough exercise equals weight problem!

Many pet owners make the mistake of thinking that all a dog needs is love, lots of it. And in some ways this is understandable; the new owner of a rescue dog, a dog that’s probably had a tough start in life, naturally wants to smother their pet with affection to help it get over its trauma.

Unfortunately, this is probably the worst thing a dog owner can do; not only will it almost certainly feed on the animal’s neuroses but also, unchecked and combined with over feeding it will lead to the obesity problem experienced by Freddy. Love your dog, of course, but in measured amounts. Exercise your dog, definitely, as much as you can.

Indeed, the well known dog expert Cesar Millan*, a.k.a. the Dog Whisperer, believes that a dog needs exercise, discipline and affection, in that order. For Cesar, exercise should be the first and most important activity between a dog and its owner, taking up to half of the time they spend together. Next is discipline, in the form of rules, boundaries and limits between the dog and its owner. Last falls affection, used as a reward for good behaviour.

Think for a moment what this means? De-



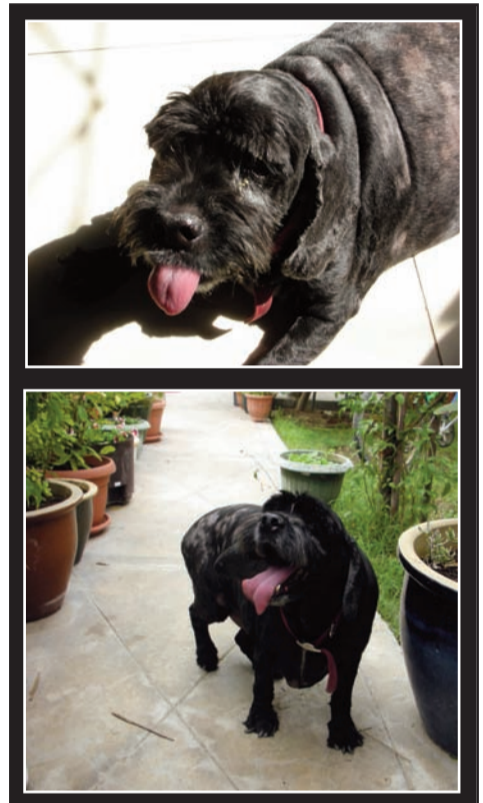
pending on the breed, this could involve up to eight hours of exercise a day! Clearly this is not an option for most dog owners unless they live on a farm and their dog is working for its living, herding cattle, for example. Here in the desert getting anywhere near this goal is a tall order not least because when the temperature hits 50 degrees and it’s 90 per cent humid even the most active animal (and owner) will wilt after a few minutes.

While there’s no escaping the fact that most breeds need to be out there on a lead for at least an hour, twice a day, happily there are a few short cuts. Why not try your dog out in your swimming pool? How about running her on a treadmill? (Yep there are doggie tread-

mills out there). What about cycling with your dog? Or if rollerblading’s your thing, get your skates on! Get her a doggie backpack and load it up so that she gets more of a workout in a shorter distance.

You could hire a dog walker to do the walking for you or take your dog to day care and play dates. There are even agility and obedience classes that will exercise his mind as well as his heart. Ask around you’ll be surprised what’s on offer.

Of course your best bet is not to get your dog into this predicament in the first place. You see, just as people find it easy to gain weight and hard to lose it, so too do dogs. Happily, under the watchful eye of Tony,



Freddy is beginning to shed the pounds through regular exercise and a restricted calorie intake. Simply put, the only way for him to lose it is to move it and reduce it! So put on your walking shoes, grab your dog’s lead and get out in the desert. You never know you might shed the odd pound or too as well!

Anyone wishing to help Tony in his work at his animal refuge should call him on 39629889.

*Milan, C. and Peltier, M.J. 2006, *Cesar’s Way: the natural, everyday guide to understanding and correcting common dog problems*, Crown Publishing: New York.



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