

# DOES MY TAIL LOOK BIG IN THIS?

If your pet pooch has a face only its mother (or you) could love, fret not — plastic surgery for dogs is taking off. From providing perfectly pointy ears, to replacing his crown jewels, there's nothing some owners won't do. By **Mark Ellwood**. Photographs by **Mike Kepka**

## SKIRTING THE ISSUE

Dog owners are opting for testicle implants when having their pets neutered. Cal Meeder likes to put his neutered puppies Luke (right) and Clyde in tutus. 'They love getting dressed up — those dogs are very human'





**B**rutus had a problem with one of his ears. It drooped. Brutus wasn't really bothered, because Brutus was a dog, a mini schnauzer, and thought his ears were just fine. But Anita Alt had other ideas. Alt, from Sao Paulo, Brazil, is dogged in her devotion to mini schnauzers. She runs a canine-grooming service aimed at mini schnauzers and their indulgent owners. "It's for people whose dogs are part of the family, who share their beds or go for drives with them in a child seat."

She also dabbles as a breeder. Brutus was a sleek, lean grey puppy with huge earning potential — but for his ear. So Alt turned to her long-time vet. He offered Brutus much the same advice a Beverly Hills dermatologist tells every starlet on her 22nd birthday: it's time for Botox.

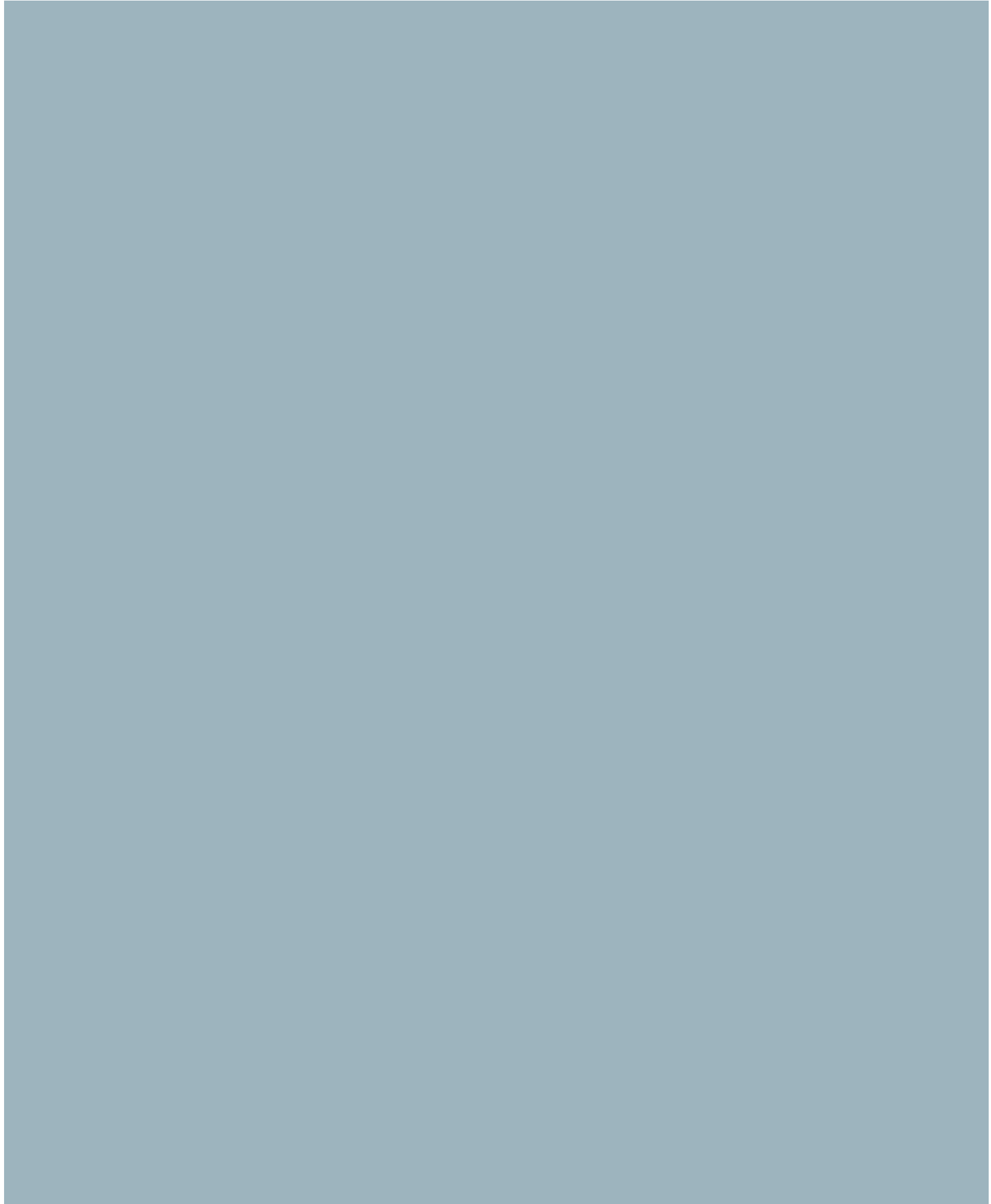
The vet used the muscle-relaxant to reposition the dog's ear. "As if by magic, Brutus's ears were good as new," marvelled Alt. "On the same day, he was ready to participate in shows." Brutus went on to be a champion several times over, retire early and use those stiff ears to please a steady stream of breed bitches with a second career in stud. Twelve years later, he's still beautiful. "He looks like a puppy!" says Alt. These days the techniques that can be used to turn pets from ugly ducklings to "Best in Show" are increasingly common, perhaps predictably, in America. In fact, the procedures available for four-legged patients mirror the most common human operations. Take Pumpkin, a chihuahua from Florida. Plumped up by

a constant stream of treats, she grew too fat to walk, so a vet performed liposuction. Another dog, Bode, in Los Angeles, was slobbering messily thanks to a loose lower lip — so the vet cinched his face tighter with a few stitches. One of Brutus's sons had an unsightly scar on his back caused by a skin infection: surgery artfully concealed it. Ozzy Osbourne paid for not one, but two, face lifts for his dog — the second after the skin grew back and impeded breathing — while plenty of show dogs sagging after giving birth have been discreetly sent for breast lifts to make them arena-worthy again.

In the world of four-legged nip-tuckery, one vet more than any other has championed and pioneered cutting-edge techniques: Dr Edgard Brito. With his silver hair and goatee, Brito resembles a suave maître d'. He speaks English with a rich Portuguese lilt. "A dog isn't beautiful with broken ears. Why not be beautiful? It's very important," he shrugs.

Brito has performed thousands of cosmetic procedures on pets, each usually costing between £300 and £600. He has happily tweaked the ears of his own doberman, Urano, and applied the filler Metacril to the eye socket of another of Alt's schnauzers, Tutsi, averting ingrowing eyelashes.

Brito's work isn't limited to dogs, although those form the bulk of his patients. He has used his ear-reforming technique on a stallion breed called mangalarga to help the horse retain his value (final bill: more than £6,000) and is often hired by TV and film crews to make sure animals are ready for close-ups. (He recalls working on a lion ►►►)





with an eye tumour). Brito monitors human operations to see the procedures he might ape for his animal patients.

His latest advance: a silicone wedge that is inserted into a flaccid ear for several months, long enough for the cartilage to reshape and naturally stiffen (recommended for German shepherds). It's then removed, leaving no evidence of intervention — essential, since pet plastic surgery is frowned upon by show judges. He rebuffs criticism — “If the pet is beautiful, the owner is happy and wants to show their pet to their friends.” And, he claims, dogs look for symmetry in the faces of their mates, much like humans. Urano's floppy ear, then, risked leaving him loveless, and as a doting owner, Brito could never allow that.

Most of Brito's work is purely cosmetic, but some surgical interventions improve vital signs as well as vital statistics. Pumpkin, the chubby chihuahua, faced an early death from obesity. Animal face-lifts and nose jobs often remedy two conditions common in pure bred, and thus in-bred, dogs. Entropion — where droopy skin turns eyelids inwards and so makes lashes scratch the cornea — occurs regularly with loose-skinned breeds like Sharpeis or retrievers. Tighten the face, and the problem is averted. Flat-faced breeds (Bulldogs or Boston Terriers), are frequently brachycephalic, where the soft palate in the mouth is squished up against, and so blocks, the airway; a nose job allows the dog to breathe better. These medically endorsed procedures are regularly conducted in Britain: insurer Petplan paid out £1m on nose surgery last year, and covered more than 484 cases of entropion in the same period. Nonetheless, the kennel community was horrified when a Crufts champion Pekingese, singled out as a superb example of the breed's flat face, was accused of having undergone a facelift to ease its breathing. Disconcertingly, the focus of the horror was on the subterfuge. Nobody queried why an animal is bred to such unhealthy extremes.



**UNDER THE KNIFE**  
Left: Kim Kardashian's dog Rocky received a pair of replacement testicles after he was neutered two years ago. Below: the pet surgeon Edgard Brito's latest advance is a silicone wedge, inserted into a dog's ear

those dogs are very human.” When his youngest puppy went to the vet for the snip, Meeder splurged on Neuticles

UltraPlus, a deluxe version crafted from solid silicone. There's more to them than just minimising scarring. “The lightweight plastic ones are lighter, so they are held up more. The silicone ones are softer and heavier, weighed down and look really real.” He thinks them well worth the cost. “Does the dog really know? I don't know. But hundreds of people have enjoyed touching my dogs' balls.”

Neuticles are a niche product, but seemingly benign. Nonetheless, Fairey wasn't allowed to follow Meeder's lead: her vet warned that Miller's silicone stand-ins have been ruled unethical in Britain. As the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) president, Jacqui Molyneux, says, the vets' governing body

lumps Neuticles in with other cosmetic procedures that she calls a “mutilation”. The ban riles Miller, who accuses the RCVS of having posed as dog owners,

emailing him to ask for British clinics where the procedure might be offered; these vets, he claims, were then brought to heel. “They've turned a wonderful, legitimate product into an underground procedure. If they cannot get it done in England, they wait until they are visiting some other country and make the arrangements to have it done there.”

Stymied by the RCVS, Vicki Fairey went ahead with neutering Lenny for his health, but couldn't take him abroad for the implants. “He is a bulldog, so wouldn't travel well.” Miller, who claims he's contacted the RCVS many times to discuss the ban but received no response, is unrepentant. He's extending his brand with a portfolio of implants from Brito-style ear stiffeners to replacement eyeballs. One market,

though, is even tougher to break into than Britain. “Cats,” he sighs, “Cats are all furry, and so fuzzy you can't see anything down there.” ■

This country has some of the most stringent veterinary regulations in the world. Such controls stunned Plymouth-based Vicki Fairey when she took her three-year old bulldog, Lenny, to the vet to be neutered. There was only one issue. “I'm no cosmetic LA queen, but I was conscious of him not losing his bulldog jewels,” she says. “The testicle sac is left behind: a baggy, horrid-looking sac, and I didn't want this for my beautiful Bully.” A quick internet search unearthed the silicone stand-in known as Neuticles, the pet world's answer to padded underpants. There was just one small problem: in Britain such implants are prohibited.

Neuticles were developed 18 years ago by a Missouri-based inventor, Gregg Miller. Since

## 'I WAS CONSCIOUS OF HIM NOT LOSING HIS BULLDOG JEWELS'

then, he's protected the machismo of over half a million animals. It isn't just about the owner's ego, he claims. “The dog knows his testicles are missing. And dogs like to mess around down there.” His product is offered in four models, at up to £400 each. Miller offers sizes XXS to XXL — the smallest have been used on rats, the largest on water buffalo at a zoo. Kim Kardashian insisted on them for her dog Rocky.

San Francisco real-estate executive Cal Meeder is a typical client, who has opted for implants in all his dogs. He cherishes Clyde and Luke; each has his own electric toothbrush and he has a trunk filled with nothing but costumes for the pair, including feather boas and tutus. “They go bananas when I go near that trunk. They love getting dressed up —



Rod Liddle's Got Issues: Tits — the latest instalment of our debate thesundaytimes.co.uk/xxxxxxxxx

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