

# Fido, frequent flier, gets his own airline

NEW YORK (AFP) - Move over Jet Set -- here comes the Pet Set.

An airline catering exclusively to furry passengers takes to the skies this July with a promise to make air travel everything the domestic animal could want.



AFP Photo: A pilot walks with a pet dog after stepping off a Pet Airways flight. Move...

The first Pet Airways flight will depart July 14 from Teterboro, a small airport outside New York, en route to Washington, Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles, said founder Alysa Binder.

"Pet Airways was created to provide a safe and comfortable solution for the transport of pets," said Binder and her husband Dan Wiesel in a company statement.

"Inspiration for the concept came from difficulties encountered when shipping Zoe, our Jack Russell Terrier, across the country."

Flights, which will cost 149 dollars each way, will be on a modified Beechcraft 1900 supplied under contract with Suburban Air.

The plane usually fits 19 passengers. This time there will be room for 50 cats and dogs.

"There will be two pilots and a pet attendant. Everything is done for the safety and comfort of the pets," Binder said.

Pooches and kitties won't actually get seats. They'll travel in kennels stacked on custom-made shelves.

Like many flights in these security conscious days, a check-in two hours before take-off is requested. To avoid the queues -- and any potential pre-flight nerves -- check-in can be done 72 hours earlier.

"We'll be happy to board your pet at our PAWS Lodge until the flight," the company's website advertises.

Then it's time to go to the Pet Lounge and onto the aircraft.

The airline asks that pets answer the call of nature while on the ground, but says they don't have to.

"Potty breaks are very important to your pet. With the human airlines, your pet could be made to hold themselves for a very, very long time. Pet Airways monitors the last time your pet had a potty break, and makes sure that they get regular potty breaks along the way," the site says.

Elizabeth Cory, spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Authority, explained that Pet Airways passengers - the company calls them "pawsengers" -- will not be alone in the sky.

"Animals have always been carried by air, horses for example. This group only has a different marketing proposal. They are contracting with an existing carrier to carry animals," Cory said.

Cory said the airline met FAA safety standards.

"For us the most important is to avoid the unnecessary shift of weight, and to insure that the animals are properly restrained."

Some 76 million cats and dogs are estimated to travel each year in the United States, including two million in airplanes.

Air travel is no easy ride for domestic creatures. Some 5,000 animals a year suffer injury while being transported, according to animal rights experts.

The pet set looks likely to avoid such unpleasantness.

"Pet attendants make sure they're all comfortable and that they, and their pet carrier, are secure," the website says. "A Pet attendant monitors and checks the comfort of all pawsengers every 15 minutes during the flight. After landing, pets will be disembarked, given a potty break, and will be available for pickup at the Pet Lounge."