

HAMSTERS

All About America's Favorite Pet Hamster

3 | Editor's Note

By Melissa L. Kauffman

So cute and fascinating to watch – the hamster has grabbed the attention of pet owners all over the world for years. And, in the United States, there are 5.6 million households with small animals as pets. Three out of every 10 households have hamsters, according to the 2003/2004 APPMA National Pet Owners Survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Inc, the leading U.S. not-for-profit trade association serving the interests of the pet products industry. That's 1,680,000 U.S. households with hamster in 2002 (the year the current survey results were conducted), quite a popular fellow!

4 | So Many Choices!

Learn how and where to find the perfect hamster for you.

By Nancy Ferris

So, you're considering adding a hamster to your household. But before heading off to a breeder or pet store, do your homework so you'll know which hamster is right for you or if any hamster suits your lifestyle. Owning a hamster is a commitment.

14 | Shop 'Til You Drop

Don't forget to get all the goodies that'll make your hamster feel right at home.

By Audrey Pavia

You've done your homework and you're ready to adopt your new hamster. But before you can bring your pet home, you need to have its new cage up and running, and ready for the new occupant.

A day or two before your hamster's scheduled arrival, pay a visit to your local pet-supply store with shopping list in hand. You'll need a host of items to make sure your pet will be happy and healthy in its new home, and must shop specifically with your species of hamster in mind.

22 | A Hamster For Everyone

An introduction to hamsters.

By Martha Boden

How do you decide if a hamster is the right pet for you? This general section on hamsters will give you a glimpse into their personalities. However, each of the five pet species has different qualities that define their characters. If you decide you want to purchase a hamster, read the following articles about each species to discover which one is your match!

Big Eyes, Poor Eyesight

One of the many charming features of the hamster face is the eyes. Coal black or deep red, a hamster's eyes are always on the move. Unfortunately, those lovely, active eyes aren't very effective. Hamsters have very poor eyesight – your furry pal can't see how far the distance is from your bed to the floor.

24 | The Independent Species

Check out the Syrian – a great pet for both children and adults

By Martha Boden

While several species of pet hamster exist, probably the most common one in the United States is the Syrian or Golden hamster (*Mesocricetus auratus*). Syrians have been available as pets for many more years than any of the dwarf species.

34 | Four Dwarfs

An introduction to dwarf hamsters.

By Linda Price

The dwarf hamsters and the larger Syrian hamsters share the same subfamily, Cricetinae, and pouch food. Nevertheless, many differences exist between the dwarfs and the Syrians. They originate from different regions of Asia and have different personalities and housing requirements.

Know what to expect from a dwarf hamster to help you decide whether a dwarf hamster or a Syrian hamster is the better pet for you. Differences exist even between the dwarfs, so do your research to decide which dwarf species you would like to own.

36 | Is The Campbell's For You?

Learn about this dwarf species' temperament, health, caging and coat colors.

By Linda Price

The Campbell's, one of the four dwarf species, is the most widely available of the dwarf hamsters in North America. It is similar in appearance and character to the Winter White dwarf hamster. On average, Campbell's (*Phodopus campbelli*) live one-and-a-half to two years and the males are generally larger than females. Both genders have similar temperaments – curious about their surroundings and always on the move when awake. Campbell's are generally the largest of the dwarf hamsters, averaging 3 to 4 inches in length, and come in the largest variety of coat colors and patterns compared to the other dwarf species.

44 | A Tale Of 3 Dwarfs

Discover how these three dwarf species differ from each other.

By Lorraine Hill

In addition to the more popular Campbell's hamster, three other species of dwarf hamsters are kept as pets in the United States and other countries – the Winter White, the Chinese and the Roborovski. The character and care requirements differ with each species, and some do not make suitable children's pets. For these reasons, you must know with certainty the identity of a species when you purchase or adopt it to be sure it will suit your household and you can provide it with proper care.

54 | The Art Of Interaction

Your one-step guide to raising an active, social hamster.

By David G. Imber

Of the many characteristics that make hamsters unique pets, one stands out above all: Hamsters are still as close to their wild state as any pet can be. If one could compress all the time that hamsters have existed on Earth into just 1,000 years, this period of time that they've been kept as pets would be just a fraction of a second. Dogs and cats have been kept as pets since ancient times, and have been bred through the years to bring out their compatibility with people. By comparison, hamsters have been kept in captivity for less than a century, and it's only been the past few decades that the best breeders have begun to focus on the idea of raising a more socialized animal.

64 | Food For Thought

Unravel the complicated relationship between a hamster and its food.

By Doran Jones

An abundance of food equates to happiness for a hamster, but not for the reason you might think. Hamsters won't overeat if you give them extra food – they will hide it. A hamster probably loves to store away food more than it loves to eat food.

Part of what makes hamsters so much fun to watch is how they handle their food – they fill their cheeks, run off to hide the food they collected, and then run back for more. Storing food makes a hamster feel secure and prepared. In fact, the word hamster comes from the German word "hamstern," meaning to hoard food. All this delight at hoarding aside, the type of food you feed your pet can greatly affect its chances of having a healthy, happy life. So what foods are best to feed?

74 | Healthy Hamster 101

Arm yourself with knowledge so your hamster lives a long, happy life.

By Elizabeth Newbery, BSc (Hons.), MRes

Hamsters may seem to have many health issues, but don't panic! Most well-looked-after hamsters may never be sick or need to see a vet. Illness prevention is better than cure, and looking after your hamster correctly is the single most important factor of prevention. Some hamsters will still become sick or need medical attention, but this will not necessarily

reflect on the quality of care.

Some veterinarians specialize in small and exotic pets. It is a common misconception that veterinarians do not treat small animals such as hamsters. This is untrue. The medical treatments available may surprise you.

86 | From Babies To Grandparents
Journey through your hamster's life stages.
By Christine Logsdail

The average life span of your pet hamsters average two to three years, but some individuals will live longer than others. By the time you adopt your pet hamster, he or she will usually be 5 to 7 weeks old. How you care for your hamster can lengthen its life to some degree, but factors such as genetics are beyond your control.

What can you expect as your hamster ages and how can you help it live the longest life possible?

94 | In The Spotlight
Ready, set, go – compete in a hamster show near you.
By Nichole Royer

"You show hamsters?" Most people are shocked to hear that hamster shows exist. Though they may know about dog shows, cat shows, horse shows and even rabbit shows, it often comes as a complete surprise that there are shows for the smaller "pocket pets."

102 | Where Did They Come From?
Trace the path the five most popular hamster species took from the wild to our homes.
By Kevin Schargen

Any animal that stores food in its cheeks is worthy of admiration. This thought came to me after learning of the antics of man's favorite cheek-stuffing companion – the hamster. Of the two dozen or so hamster species that exist, five are fancied by pet enthusiasts from around the world. The most popular of these is *Mesocricetus auratus*, a sweet-tempered rodent whose history with man dates back to the 18th century.

110 | Hamsters In Pop Culture
Find the hidden hamsters in our lives.
By Anton J. Souza

In an episode of the animated television series *The Simpsons* ("Duffless," #9F14), Lisa Simpson concocts a science project that pits her brother Bart's brainpower against a hamster. The hamster passes all of her tests while Bart, unable to avoid the electrical shock obstacles, fails. After Bart uncovers Lisa's project, he retaliates with his own science project, which posits a question that has plagued mankind for centuries, "Can hamsters fly airplanes?" The hamster is seated in a toy airplane and dressed as a pilot, complete with goggles and scarf. At the science fair, the crowd "oohs," "ahhs" and says, "Isn't that cute." Without seeing the other projects, the principal awards Bart 1st prize.

This basically summarizes how the world interprets these feisty little furballs. They're cute, they're furry, they're probably smarter than the average 10-year-old cartoon boy, and, well, they liven up dull situations.

What makes hamsters such a force to be reckoned with in pop culture?

118 | The Hamster: A Hot Pet Pick
Ten reasons why a hamster should be your next pet.
By Gerry Bucsis and Barbara Somerville

Hamsters are one of the most popular small, caged pets in North America. And no wonder! They're cute, curious and furrily irresistible. Just think of how many of your friends, relatives, neighbors and school buddies have one of these little critters as part of the family.

126 | A Photo Celebration Of Pet Hamsters

128 | Resources

