

A canine trendsetter in Bellingham

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Photo by Jennifer Kinder

Spyder, a 4-year-old German shepherd, is featured in a just-released calendar compiled by the nonprofit Vested Interest in K9s Inc. All of the proceeds from the calendar will go toward buying vests for police dogs



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BELLINGHAM — Police dog Spyder is something of a trailblazer in the world of canine fashion. When the 4-year-old German shepherd started wearing his military-style camouflage protective vest, all of the other police dogs absolutely had to have one.

Spyder, as Mr. May, sports the trendy vest in a calendar released this summer filled with pictures of drug-sniffing, bomb-detecting, life-saving police dogs. Compiled by Vested Interest in K9s Inc., a nonprofit that raises money to vest dogs, it has turned heads, and not just furry ones.

Sandy Marcal, founder and president of Vested Interest, said the calendar has already helped vest one dog — generally vests cost between \$1,300 and \$1,400.

Not to mention, the calendar has increased Spyder's celebrity, making him the Jennifer Lopez of service canines. "Spyder started a trend with that multicam vest," Marcal said.

Officer Leonard Gosselin, Spyder's handler, said he gets countless requests from people asking if they can have their picture taken with Spyder.

"Everybody loves Spyder," he said, adding that he's seriously considering requesting royalties from the dog's many appearances. And he said people just love "the camo vest."

But Spyder wears the vest not only to look cool, though he does of course. It shields his organs from bullets, knives and bats. Even its color is useful, allowing Spyder to move unseen through the woods as he hunts a fleeing suspect.

"It's a cool looking vest," Gosselin said. "But the reason I picked it is all these vests are black or navy. The dog will be searching in the woods, and it's important for him to blend into his surroundings."

One of Spyder's strongest weapons, aside from those powerful jaws and sharp teeth, is the element of surprise. Out of nowhere, the suspect suddenly sees an angry dog and is quickly frightened into

Spyder received his vest last Christmas with help from Vested Interest, Vet Med, a Franklin-based pet supply store, and a local family.

Marcal started Vested Interest in 2009, and to date, she has put vests on almost 300 dogs.

"We work hand in hand with law enforcement," she said. "In most cases, we will find out about a dog that needs a vest ... and try to find someone locally that might want to help out; or we raise money for events. We help to get them vested and in turn they help show the public what these dogs do and why it's important for them to have this equipment."

Marcal has never owned a former or current police dog. She said she was driven to the cause of providing dogs with vests after watching a documentary about U.S. Army dogs in the Vietnam War. It crystalized for her the fact that these dogs require as much protection as the officers or soldiers they protect.

A police dog is in part trained for situations involving armed suspects. The dog charges forward into unpredictable danger so that the officer doesn't have to.

"The dog is an officer," Gosselin said. "And the dog sometimes is going to be deployed in a critical situation. We aren't going to send an officer into a house if we know someone is armed in there. It sounds kind of awful — that you have to put the human before the dog — but that's what these dogs are trained for. They will take a bullet for their handler."

To purchase a copy of the calendar featuring Spyder, visit http://www.bellinghamma.org/Pages/BellinghamMA_News/0396F55C-000F8513

For more information call 508-824-6978 or visit www.vik9s.org

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