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No more hot dogs

Water-cooled jacket lets K-9s beat heat in dog days of summer

BY SHERYL BASS

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BOULDER — When it's cold outside people often throw on a coat for protection from the elements. Now that it's hot out, dogs can do the same.

Cool K-9 LLC, a home-based business in Boulder founded in March, manufactures evaporative cooling jackets for dogs.

The jackets contain polymer crystals that retain moisture for hours when soaked in water. These same crystals are often used to grow plants hydroponically.

"Dogs don't have any sweat glands," said Vice President Igor Gamow. "These jackets simulate sweat glands because as the water evaporates it cools."

In the past five months, the team has sold more than 100 jackets and has five distributors in Colorado and one in North Carolina. Startup costs were a modest \$2,500, funded by Gamow's personal savings. These costs included \$350 for the do-it-yourself patent search and application, taxes to become a business, construction of the company Web site, fabrics, cooling crystals and booths at community events.

Company President Justin Weihs, 25, created the cooling-jacket concept when his Boykin spaniel suffered heat exhaustion one summer day. Weihs attempted to cool the dog by placing a wet T-shirt on him. However, he continually had to rehydrate the shirt to keep his pal comfortable. He believed that if there were a way to keep such a garment wet for a longer period, it could prevent a dog from overheating.

Several months later, Weihs, an undergraduate film student, was in the same University of Colorado rock 'n' roll film class with Gamow, 68. Weihs was already aware that Gamow had invented The Gamow Bag, which "tricks" an altitude-sick mountain climber's body into believing it had made a descent. Gamow, who has approximately 15 patents on other inventions, also had created "spring-loaded" running shoes and a portable, battery-operated scuba device.

Weihs approached Gamow with the idea for a cooling jacket. It was Gamow's wife, Elfriede, of Elfriede's Fine Fabrics in Boulder, who used her sewing skills to create the Cool K-9 jacket prototype.

The nontoxic garments are red and yellow both for product recognition, and because sunlight reflects nicely off the yellow area. The jacket is activated by soaking it in water for about 30 minutes. Weihs and Gamow said the jacket should not be placed



DORY JOHNSON

Igor Gamow, left, and Justin Weihs have created Cool K-9 LLC, a home-based business in Boulder that makes water-cooled jackets for dogs. The jackets contain polymer crystals that retain moisture for hours after being soaked in water. Modeling the jackets, from left, are Timber, a German shepherd, and Jax-O-Million, a Boykin spaniel.

in a refrigerator or a freezer. The jacket can be cleaned by hand-washing it with nonabrasive detergent and letting it dry naturally.

Jackets cost approximately \$40 for dogs smaller than 30 pounds, \$50 for a 30- to 60-pound dog and \$60 for a 60- to 100-pound dog. An extender is available for dogs larger than 100 pounds for \$6.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 2 >

> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Because a patent is pending, the two-man operation has yet to approach large corporations such as PetSmart or attempt to sell the jackets on eBay. Company expansion plans include selling the intellectual property once a patent is obtained. Because other doggy cooling products already exist (including a cooling mat, a cooling kennel, a cooling bandana and a cooling hat), the Cool K-9 jackets might not be patentable. If that is the case, the two will continue selling their wares to small boutiques throughout the country. Additionally, the team is seeking a new employee to handle marketing. Eventually they may create higher end, more fashionable jackets to sell at different price ranges.

Jay Henry owns Chow Down pet shop in Evergreen. In the past month he has sold six Cool K-9 jackets.

“To properly cool a dog, you really need to cool the lungs and the chest cavity,” he said. “Everyone who has purchased one (a Cool K-9

jacket) has come back to me with exceptional feedback.” He added that the jackets also keep dogs dry, a side benefit for overheated show dogs just before they enter the ring.

Henry owns three dogs and has two foster dogs. He uses the jacket for his 12-year-old Staffordshire terrier, who, in his advanced age, is less able to tolerate heat.

“I think, if you’re traveling at all with your dog, you should definitely buy the jacket — especially if you’re going to be spending any time in the car. It’s not just for longhaired dogs.”

Gamow, a retired University of Colorado professor, sells it scientifically.

“When we go under water, we have to have special equipment to handle that extreme environment. For dogs, this product ‘creates’ sweat glands, making the environment less extreme for them.”

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