

H&G advice

PETS

Paws for thought

Some people are crazy about cats, and others far prefer a pooch. **Bradley Trevor Greive** is firmly in the latter camp, and makes no bones about it.

There are countless verified tales of canine loyalty and bravery from dogs large and small who have sacrificed themselves for those they love. They have guarded our families and homes at great cost, fallen beside us in the trenches and, while standing firm, bared their teeth against evil intent irrespective of its terrifying form. They have even saved us from ourselves. When bullets shred the breath of angels and

bombs shake the foundation of our faith, dogs rally to our aid without question, while cats pause only to steal food as they scurry to a warm, soundproof nook and resume grooming their nether regions. Consider the many people saved by search-and-rescue dogs in the London Blitz during the darkest days of World War II. And again, when our hopes for the new century unravelled in the face of hideous terrorist atrocities, dogs stood tall.

As the twin towers of the World Trade Centre shivered and twisted sickly from the hideous explosions, the crowded fire stairs soon filled with screams and smoke. In the midst of this choking madness, two guide dogs calmly led their blind owners down the endless spiral of stairs to safety. Then, during the horrific aftermath, some 300 search-and-rescue dogs were rushed to Ground Zero to help emergency teams carry out the hazardous rescue and recovery mission. They went where no man could. The excruciating heat, toxic dust and collapsing rubble were so perilous that several dogs died in the line of duty, and many more were injured. Eighteen families remain whole today because of their heroic efforts.

No one was saved by a cat.

The reason dogs surpass all other species is quite simple: they get people. It's been this way since dogs and humans first bumped into one another and thought, 'Hey, this could work!'

For more than 15,000 years, dogs and human beings have been drawn together by mutual cooperation, shared values and a sense of joyous fraternity.

Cats, on the other hand, came for the mice and stayed for the fish sticks. It goes beyond the fact that dogs are motivated by love and cats are motivated by food.

In the simplest terms... dogs are social, cats are sociopaths.

One need only look at the open, friendly face of any dog to find evidence of their affable nature; dogs are fundamentally social creatures. They see the bigger picture. They appreciate togetherness. They care about others.



Dogs want to make friends. They want to see the best in everyone and learn as much as they can about whomever they meet. Admittedly, inhaling each other's posterior is not the most appealing way to gather such intimate information, but neither is cyber-stalking on Google. Furthermore, if human greetings can

If you care for dogs long enough they become members of the family. Cats become destructive housemates with bad breath.

range from high fives, hugs and handshakes to air kisses, backslaps and rubbing noses, then who are we to draw the line at a curious sniff?

The concept of family is important to a dog. A dog will live anywhere and endure anything if it means the whole family is safe, happy and stays together.

Cats, on the other hand, focus on comfort. Sure, they can be social enough when it suits them, though when that will be is generally hard to say.

While cats have a keen sense of their own needs, dogs have a remarkable understanding of ours. Their devotion is pure and sincere. We are foremost in their minds in every exchange. Dogs carefully gauge our feelings, and what they learn is then immediately reflected in their behaviour. A subtle frown instantly tells a dog she made a mistake. A kind word lets her know she's been good. Better than good!

You can talk to dogs for hours on end and they will keep on listening to you, ears cocked, eyes focused, desperate to get the gist of what you are trying to tell them. To cats, virtually everything you say is background noise, including their names. They may turn to observe you

dispassionately for a moment but, having established that no tuna titbits are forthcoming, they will tune out quicker than a twitch of the tail. As gifted as they are at hunting, hiding and licking their private parts, cats simply don't have the mental or emotional capacity to consider the feelings of other creatures. In 2002, scientists from Harvard University proved that dogs are actually more adept at intuiting human emotion, or 'reading' people, than our closest living relatives (by which I mean chimpanzees, not your in-laws - although this may also be true in many cases).

This is what sets dogs apart from all other animals and especially cats: dogs genuinely have a sense of what we are trying to communicate. And, with a little patience, we can understand most of their feelings and intentions, too. **H&G**



Extracts from *Why Dogs Are Better Than Cats* (Andrews McMeel Publishing, \$32.95).

Are you firmly of the feline persuasion? Has Bradley Trevor Greive's pro-dog argument set your cat-owner blood boiling? Share your view in a letter or email h&g@acpmagazines.com.au.