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Pooches dress to impress

Melissa Matheson
 and **Renata Gortan**

PET couture is fast turning the catwalk into a dogwalk, with owners set to spend \$780 million this year on designer fashion for their furry friends.

In fact, the average dog owner spends \$1056 a year on their pampered pooch — compared with just the \$804 that the average parent spent on children's clothing in 2008.

Wardrobes now include tropical-print bikini tops and boardshorts for the beach, cotton dresses decorated with diamontes, and designer pet carriers for travelling.

Dog groomer June Venticimque, 44, from Blakehurst, has been dressing her own poodles for 26 years and has spent about \$3000 on clothes and accessories.

"Years ago people used to look at you and think you were crazy, but dogs are seen more like humans now. Before, dogs were dogs," she said.

"They're part of the family."

Debbie Harrison, founder of Best Dressed Pets, an online animal fashion store, said bright colours, dresses, caps, charms and fleeces for winter are the most popular items.

And her pampered pooches love to play dress-ups.

"I don't have girls, I live with three males and the dogs like the clothes,"

she said. "When they are wearing the clothes, people stop and give them lots of attention."

Harrison said pet fashion, including shoes for dogs, isn't an extravagance — it's also practical.

Padded coats with fur collars help keep her pets warm in winter and lightweight garments in summer help to protect them from sunburn.

"Fleeces are good for dogs with arthritis and for smaller dogs, so they can be warm all year round," she said.

"If you walk out of the car on to cement or asphalt barefoot, it's hot and hurts. If it hurts you, it hurts the dog and dog shoes prevent them from getting sore paws."

Furry friend fashion

- The average dog owner now spends **\$1056** per year on their pet
- Families spent an average of **\$804** on children's clothing during 2008
- Parents shelled out another **\$1712** on their own wardrobes in the same year
- Raising three children will cost an average Sydney family more than **\$1.1 million** over a lifetime





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Pretty in pink: Ellie, Bijou and Ruby-Dooby-doo at the Leichhardt dog park