

When a Small Dog Really Must Have A Second Coat

By MICHELLE SLATALLA

I AM not a person who believes in dressing dogs in clothes. But the other day, as I watched Sticky's teeth chatter histrionically behind her little black lips to call attention to the horror of sub-60 temperatures, I decided to make an exception.

Some dogs are rough and tumble. They launch themselves recklessly into icy streams. They crash through briars and thorns in pursuit of rabbits. They roll around on dead squirrels.

Sticky is not one of those dogs.

Sticky is finicky. Sticky is delicate. She even picks at food. If a cat were a dog, she would be Sticky.

I never had a small dog before. When I first saw Sticky as a puppy, she had enormous Flying Nun ears and pranced around the house like a tiny mechanical horse. Perhaps this distracted me from considering the full implications of living with a papillon, the same breed of lapdog that once lounged around the French court.

Sticky was born to eat cake, not to walk outside in winter alongside Otto, our big Labrador retriever. With the rainy season under way here in Northern California, he capers hysterically in puddles while she skulks under awnings with a droopy dripping tail. Even when the weather is dry she shivers theatrically.

This is why I decided Sticky needed a coat. Or a sweater. Or something.

I went online to look at the possibilities. At Teacuppuppies.com I saw a Chihuahua in a rose-embroidered sweater (\$62.99) and matching beanie. I read a description at Purecountrypetboutique.com that said, "Tummy area is open so they can still do their business." Adorabledogclothes.com had a Texas cowgirl outfit with a straw hat (for \$25.59). Thegildedpaw.com had a poncho category.

I looked down at Otto, who was sprawled on the floor with a filthy, moldy tennis ball and I said, "I can't do this."

Otto stopped snoring. He looked up. He scratched. He went back to sleep, and his legs twitched as he chased a dream rabbit.

Like a real dog.

I phoned my husband.

"The photos of dogs in sequined dresses are particularly troubling,"



PONCHO from Thegildedpaw.com is modeled by Olive, a puggle, a cross between a pug and a beagle.

ROSE EMBROIDERED sweater from Teacuppuppies.com. Big dogs get along fine wearing their own coats.



Photographs by Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

names like Little Man, Sticky Elizabeth and, inexplicably, Tinka Friedman.

"Get her a sweater with a skull and crossbones on it," my husband said.

"That will terrify her," I said.

"If it's on her back, she won't see it," he said. "Cover her eyes when you put it on."

A little blindfold might work. I found a scary black skull-and-crossbones T-shirt at Thepamperedpup.com (\$28, with "Monster" written across the back).

But would the cotton lycra fabric keep Sticky warm in the rain? I phoned Derek Hovey, the Web site's owner, to find out.

"If you're talking about wearing it for purposes of staying dry in the rain, a raincoat would be better," Mr. Hovey said. "There are no raincoats with a skull and crossbones

Roger. Barely were we inside the door than Otto tried to sidle inconspicuously toward the dog treats. The sales clerk intercepted him and fitted him with an orange slicker. It looked very handsome. He did not seem to notice he was wearing it as he edged toward the organic dog biscuits.

"Sticky is a medium," the clerk said.

Sticky tried on a fuzzy turquoise sweater.

"Tinka, you're so cute!" my youngest daughter said.

Sticky looked pained.

Sticky tried on a pink turtleneck.

"Little Man, it's you," my daughter said.

Sticky hid under a table.

Sticky tried on a red raincoat with a Count Dracula collar.

"Nice," I said.

It was \$60.

We bought it.

My daughter asked if Otto could have a coat too. I said no. We took it off him. He did not seem to notice as he lurched toward a display of bones.

On the walk home my daughter said, "If you get Sticky a T-shirt too, she can layer." My oldest daughter advised, "It will be a good look for her."

It is a measure of how far gone I was that I considered this statement to be good advice. Back home I saw that Smalldogmall.com had two skull options — the Happy Skull T (\$25) and the Bad to the Bone T (\$38, comes in black or pink) — both of which looked lightweight.

"The T-shirt would be fine for lounging around the house, but if you're going out and the wind's blowing, you're going to need something more substantial," said Robin Weaver, the owner of Smalldogmall.com.

Her dog, Doug, who is pictured on the site modeling the clothes, prefers the whipstitch sweater (\$20) with a turtleneck, Ms. Weaver said.

Sticky was born to eat cake, not to walk outside in winter.

"Sticky herself is enough decorative accent," I said.

Mr. Hovey steered me toward some of his site's popular raincoat designs — the Lobster and the Whale — and also mentioned pearlized slickers. ("Reversible," he said, "so if you want to go out at night, eating at a restaurant, you can reverse to the other side, and it's a fashionable print.")

Size challenged me. When I tried to measure Sticky from the base of her neck to the base of her tail, she