

# 'Tis Her Season. Oh, how jolly...

Put ten vets in a room and apparently half will advise you to spay your bitch at six months and half will tell you that for health reasons she should have a season first – that is assuming you definitely don't want to breed her. The reasons for the differing opinions vary but aside from the obvious risk of unwanted puppies, include an increased risk of breast or ovarian cancer later in the dog's life, depending on your course of action.

**W**e couldn't find ten vets but ours was definitely in the latter camp. It made sense to us to let Lucy reach womanhood before we did anything drastic and besides we hadn't yet definitively decided whether or not we might, one day, breed from her. As she was the only girl in her litter, we couldn't help feeling that it was down to her to continue the impressive pedigree lineage the Kennel Club sent us along with her registration papers. Her father was a Scottish "Prince" don't you know.

It probably comes as no surprise that when it comes to the question of breeding little Luce, the keener of her human parents is the one who happens to spend most of the day working in an office and is the more financially astute. Reading up a little, breeding seems to be a full time job for two to three months; from being a birth partner all the way through to finding good homes for the little ones and while I loved reading James Herriot novels as a child, I am not sure I am ready to be Jane Herriot. Plus we only have a small kitchen and I can hardly say I'm ready to tend and care for multiple puppies when I'm not prepared to have children myself yet. And while I do indeed work from home and therefore would be around during the day, I will need to actually do some writing between mopping the floor if we are to keep Lucy supplied with her favourite organic dog food.

Canine seasons occur around every six months, but after what felt like weeks of waiting and bracing ourselves every time she peed more than twice on walk, Lucy's first season arrived just at the point we were wondering if she was even going to bother having one at all. Sadly she didn't take to her bed with a tub of ice-cream, nor did she install herself on the sofa with a selection of her favourite rom com DVDs. Nope, when girlie dogs go into season, they have just as much



energy as before and are feeling even more sociable than normal, anxious to tout their wares. And therein lay the first problem; I couldn't take her for walks at the normal time for fear of a Fulham gang bang. Indeed I spent any time outdoors, checking her lead was securely fastened and scanning the horizon and the side-streets for approaching dogs, squinting to see if I could see whether or not they had balls before they got too close for comfort.

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**The mess factor (if I'm honest, in the abstract my main concern) was minimal. I know that probably makes me shallow and superficial but with cream coloured stair carpet it was more than a small cause for concern.**

for concern. I am also more than a little proud to report that within hours Lucy had responded intuitively to the washable blankets strategically placed in her favourite snooze spots and therefore didn't have one major messing accident which was fortunate as the dog season's ultimate accessory "doggie pants" we had bought for her were impossible to put on to an under-exercised dog. They were necessarily snug, fastened with buckles, with a tail hole and room for a panty-liner – I think I can leave the rest to your imaginations. Suffice to say that whoever invented them had never owned our dog.

To my relief we didn't have an orderly (or disorderly) queue of baying dogs at the front door, despite my mother-in-law's concern that this could be the case. And therefore we didn't need the aerosol "bugger off" spray which along with the pants had also caught my eye on a previous visit to the pet shop.

Giving Lucy enough exercise was however incredibly challenging. The park was off limits: too many dogs. The pavements and narrow tow paths were more manageable and fortunately the days are longish at the moment. And so I started setting my alarm for a time previously only entertained as the departure hour for cheap package holidays. But I soon realised that the dogs being walked before 6am in the morning are exactly the dogs you never want to meet and so I lay in for a further hour or so and having invested in



an extendable lead, took my chances. I tried jogging with her a couple of times but her four fit legs versus my thirty-something ones meant I was far more out of breath than she ever was. To make matters worse, Lucy became increasingly tarty and moody, walking with her tail aloft, practically offering herself up for impregnating to any dog who was interested. By the second or third day I was wondering if we should move to a remote island off the coast of Scotland or could just sedate her until it was all over.

I experimented further with walk timings (11am seemed to be a quiet time on the block) and abandoned my usual routes for somewhere a little more off the beaten track. This approach started well. However we ran into a couple of complete males off their leads

who were persistent in their attentions and with their owners often at least thirty seconds further down the tow path, I became adept at holding two panting dogs apart until back-up arrived and the male dogs were literally dragged on their way as I apologised profusely in a very British way whilst Luce batted her eyelids and tried to slip the dogs her address and phone number. I started to fantasise about the day when I could let her off the lead again and even took her on several road trips to visit her granny whose large walled garden provided a welcome opportunity to properly tire her out.

The pre-season had passed us by, but after almost two weeks on heat it was clear the post-season was also going to be an issue. Whilst Luce might no longer have been fertile,

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she clearly still smelled fantastic and was too much of a piper to risk in a crowd. Suffice to say, it was a very long month and a lonely one as we both missed our friends from the park but finally thanks to lots of small walks at carefully picked times of day, she & I made it, intact, footloose and puppy-free.

Without hesitation I booked her an appointment at the vet to have her spayed before her second season. On the morning of the operation I have to confess that I shed a tear after I'd dropped her off. I think it was a sisterhood thing, plus the fact that she bounded in to the practice so happily and trustingly, without a care in the world. While all the dogs and cats of my childhood had been spayed, this was the first time I had personally been responsible for delivering my furry friend to her fate.

When I went to fetch Lucy later that afternoon, her Frankenstein scar red, her stitches blue and her spirits low I felt incredibly guilty as I typed in my pin number to pay the bill for her total hysterectomy. She barely lifted her head on the way home as I cuddled her and reassured her that "It" girls in the canine world have the most fun and that she would never be walked on a lead for weeks on end again (at least not after she'd recovered from this ordeal). I swear she just sighed. She didn't even like my "calling a spayed a spayed" joke...Mind you, neither did anyone else.

Bed-rest was prescribed for the first couple of days and yet, after less than a week of forced recuperation she was rolling around on the carpet, racing up the stairs and furious with me for never walking her quite as far as the park gate. In two more weeks she was as good as new; our pocket rocket was restored to her former glory – well almost. Her coat was as shiny as ever, she hadn't put on a load of weight and best of all, she appeared to have forgiven me. Now we can walk wherever we like, whenever we like and look every male dog in the eye and the balls. Life's no longer a bitch.

• Find out more about Jane at [www.janesigaloff.com](http://www.janesigaloff.com)