



Pictures: ROGER ALLEN

THIS is a picture to break a million hearts. Ten dogs — ears pricked, soft brown eyes pleading, washed and groomed until they're soft and gleaming. All desperately trying to blank out dark memories of neglect and cruelty and hoping that, finally, their luck has changed.

It has, thanks to the astonishing kindness and dedication of Bill and Sylvia Van Atta of Many Tears Animal Rescue, near Llanelli, who rescue thousands of unwanted dogs each year from pounds, breeders and broken homes. And then house them with temporary foster carers for the first stage of their long and difficult rehabilitation process.

Doggy fosterers — who knew? Yes, Many Tears has a national network of more than 200 canine fosterers all around the UK. Their selfless and self-funded role in homing cowed and nervous animals (some so jumpy they need sedating) who have seen no love, no care, no cuddles and don't have the first clue how to play, let alone trust anyone, is extraordinary.

Last month, after being fed, washed, clipped, spayed, micro-chipped, inoculated and wormed, this furry crew were transported by van from South Wales.

Their destination was a series of car parks along the M4 where groups of eager fosterers were waiting to take them home and coax them to eat, love, walk on a lead and, in too many cases, simply stop shaking.

They are safe now, but all the dogs pictured here have their own sad back stories.

1 **KEY**, a six-year-old-Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, is a breeding dog who wasn't producing enough puppies to justify her keep.

She was badly under-muscled and fat, with a heart murmur and rotten teeth — 16 had to be removed immediately.

Many breeding dogs suffer terrible dental problems because they've been fed fallen — or dead — farm-stock, often entire sheep. They damage their mouths fighting through the wool and bones. Many have never seen proper dog food.

'She is shut down and has no spark at the moment,' says Sylvia. 'She's still in shock — a bit zombified.'

Her ideal home would contain other Cavaliers. Former breeding dogs need company and, according to Sylvia, there's nothing Cavaliers like more than hanging out in a basket chatting with friends.

2 **KOLE**, a four-year-old Retriever, was found with the dead body of his owner on a police emergency call out. 'He had clearly been loved and was desperately sad to start with,' says Sylvia. 'But he soon perked up and has a lovely manner — polite, gentle and perfect for someone with a lot of love to give.'

3 **SIMMER**, a two-year-old Jug (a designer Jack Russell/Pug cross, especially bred to eliminate pugs' inbred breathing and spinal problems) is another rejected breeding dog.

There are restrictions on how many dogs breeders can keep — if they are caught with too many, they have to reduce numbers in a hurry. 'We've had

by Jane Fryer

Jugs coming out of our ears lately,' says Sylvia, 'too many to find homes for.' Simmer needs an owner with time and patience — someone who isn't going to give up too easily, won't expect too much and ideally has a couple of dogs already, for company.

4 **OREO**, a four-year-old Collie Cross, was rescued from a dog pound hours before he was due to be destroyed. His fur was matted but he was well nourished, so Sylvia assumes he was a much-loved pet of an elderly person who perhaps died.

'Now he's recovered from his fright, he is well mannered, sits beautifully and gets on with everyone,' she says. 'He needs an owner with a big heart who would love the company.'

5 **MELODY** the Labrador, also four, is an ex breeding dog abandoned because she wasn't producing puppies any more and was no longer a viable business asset.

Like many breeding dogs, she was grossly overweight, under-exercised and her whole life was breeding. Walks in the park, playing, running in the fields were unknown to her. Since being rescued, she has lost weight, grown in confidence and slowly adapted to her new freedom.

A loving home, with a patient owner and, ideally, other dogs for company, would suit her.

6 **KEMP**, a two-year-old Springer Spaniel, is a failed gun dog who would have been shot had Many Tears not rescued him. 'He's a lovely dog and desperate to please, but maybe he was gun shy,' says Sylvia.

He was one of the lucky ones — he arrived in good condition and has adapted brilliantly to his new life, loves tennis balls and running about and is now looking for a happy home.

7 **SUGAR**, a three-year-old Retriever, is another grotesquely

It's a new idea — abused dogs placed with 'foster' families whose nurturing love prepares them for a permanent home. Read their heart-rending stories

Would YOU foster a dog?

overweight breeding dog. When she arrived, she weighed nearly 88lb (more than 26lb overweight) and was frightened and cowed.

Now she loves cuddles and would adapt well to any new owner who gives her a healthy diet and plenty of canine company.

8 **LUKE**, a four-year-old Golden Doodle (Retriever/Golden Retriever cross) is another rejected breeder.

While his fur was matted and his teeth needed attention, he was well socialised and used to walking on a lead. He has a lovely friendly manner and has already been offered a home.

9 **BRIAN**, a year-old Retriever, experienced no neglect, but was given up by a young family with three toddlers who had taken on more than they could manage with an over-exuberant puppy.

According to Sylvia, he is poorly trained and very bouncy but also a clever, smart, sweet dog. He would be the perfect pet for someone who has plenty of time to train him and a lot of space for running about and having fun.

10 **DEAN**, a four-year-old German Shepherd, had a particularly miserable time. He and his brother Lucas (not pictured)

were guard dogs at a petrol station — and then abandoned after the business went bankrupt.

When they were rescued, both dogs were badly undernourished, dehydrated, covered in engine oil and lucky to be alive.

Sylvia started them on eight tiny meals a day to stretch their bellies — liquid food first, before graduating to a tummy-soothing mixture of chicken and banana whizzed up in Sylvia's Nutribullet (banana to bind and give sugar and chicken for protein).

Lucas was unconscious, barely breathing — he had twisted and turned until his chain had tightened around his neck to strangulation point.

Like all German Shepherds, Dean needs a home with owners who fully understand the breed — they are smart and clever but need to be looked after properly.

He is not suitable to be homed with a family who have young children.

For all these dogs, foster care is their first, vital, stop to a normal life.

Some fosterers, such as Carol and Mark Cawthorne, have their own dogs already.

They have eight dogs and three children living in their three-bedroom townhouse in Dunstable, Bedfordshire — and take all their canine charges on holiday with them to

Norfolk. Others, such as Julie Cochran and her banker husband Steven, from Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, have turned their homes into dog sanctuaries.

'I've had a few so scared they just hide under bushes in the garden,' says Julie.

All struggle to say goodbye when the dogs move on — usually after a few weeks — to their permanent adoptive homes.

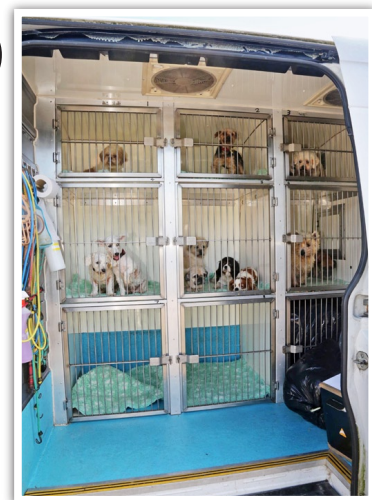
'It is heart-breaking when they go,' says Karen Coppin, 45, from March, Cambridgeshire, who has fostered 45 dogs in two years. 'I cry my eyes out but it is wonderful to see the change in them and I'm so pleased to see them move on.'

After 12 years rescuing dogs, Sylvia is still amazed at the selflessness of the fosterers ('they put their heart and soul into helping these dogs'), and staggered at how badly some people look after their animals.

Looking at his little gang, it's hard for any dog lover not to have a little cry, or think seriously about offering at least one of them a home.

But these are the lucky ones. They don't have behavioural issues, they scrub up well, their teeth are largely intact, their coats aren't so matted that they've had to be shaved and they're off to the next phase of their lives.

'The pretty ones usually get to foster homes



Safe: Another dog finds a fosterer; top, and, above, off to a new life in the van

within two to three weeks,' says Sylvia. 'But the uglier, more problematic ones can be with us for a year,' she says sadly. 'But we persevere until we've found them all somewhere.'

■ Many Tears Animal Rescue, call 01269 843084 between 10am and 4pm or email info@manytearsrescue.org

Additional reporting: DANNY BUCKLAND