

# Taste of Dog Foods Appraised By a Dog and His Best Friend

By RAYMOND A. SOKOLOV

Every night in this country, 32,600,000 dogs eat dinner. So do about 20,000,000 cats. And more and more of them every year are eating commercial pet food. Americans will spend \$1.5-billion for 6 billion pounds of pellets and kibble and dog biscuits—much more than the \$390-million spent on baby food—without having the slightest idea of what is in that miserable-looking slop or how it tastes.

Not to worry. Veterinary researchers insist that more is known about dog and cat nutritional requirements than about human needs. The perfect pet diet, they say, is already in supermarkets. And a recent canine-human dog food tasting session indicated that, however awful it looks, most commercial dog food is no worse than bad hamburger.

The only trouble with most dogs' diets is what people feel compelled to put in them. Animal scientists seem to agree that all would be well if normally healthy dogs were simply given unlimited access to nothing but commercial dry food and water and nothing else. Table scraps and "all-meat" canned products are not necessary and, all by themselves, won't make a complete diet.

"A dog need never ever see a chunk of meat in a lifetime," said Bernard Wasserman, D.V.M., a prominent local veterinarian who has raised many dogs on dry food alone.

Dr. Albert Jonas, director of the Animal Care Division of the Yale School of Medicine, concurs. His laboratories maintain anywhere from 100 to 200 dogs at any given time on dry food.

But at home, Dr. Jonas admitted his Cairn terrier often chomps into a plate of leftovers ("It's a pet. You know, the children . . ."). Like many lay dog owners, Dr. Jonas has allowed his dog

to taste the poorly balanced but more delicious (for dogs as well as people) delights of natural food.

There is no turning back from this. Once a dog has tried real meat from his master's table or meat from a can of dog food, he will probably never be satisfied with the nutritionally splendid boredom of that coarsely ground meal called kibble again.

And so, though he calls an all-leftover diet "bad news" and even turns up his nose at the very popular (with dogs and masters) all-meat dog foods such as Alpo, Dr. Wasserman recommends a compromise diet of dry food supplemented with meat to promote canine appetite and soothe human guilt.

Mrs. Pat O'Keefe, a spokesman for the industry-sponsored Pet Food Institute in Chicago, said she does not think this enthusiasm for dry food was well-founded. She was quick to point to more palatable semimoist and canned foods that are also complete and balanced foods, according to the guidelines laid down by the National Research Council publication, "Nutrient Requirements of the Dog."

## Unbalanced but Very Palatable

Neither Dr. Jonas nor Dr. Wasserman was dogmatically opposed to nondry foods. But they may be reacting to a powerful trend among dog-owners toward buying unbalanced but very palatable products such as 100 per cent horsemeat.

At any rate, much of the mystery of dog food buying for the layman is in the process of disappearing. Already stringent labeling rules are now compelling manufacturers to indicate in plain language which foods are complete and which are supplementary.

But there will always be the problem of taste and connoisseurship. Both dogs

and masters will always play an important role in deciding what Fido gets for dinner.

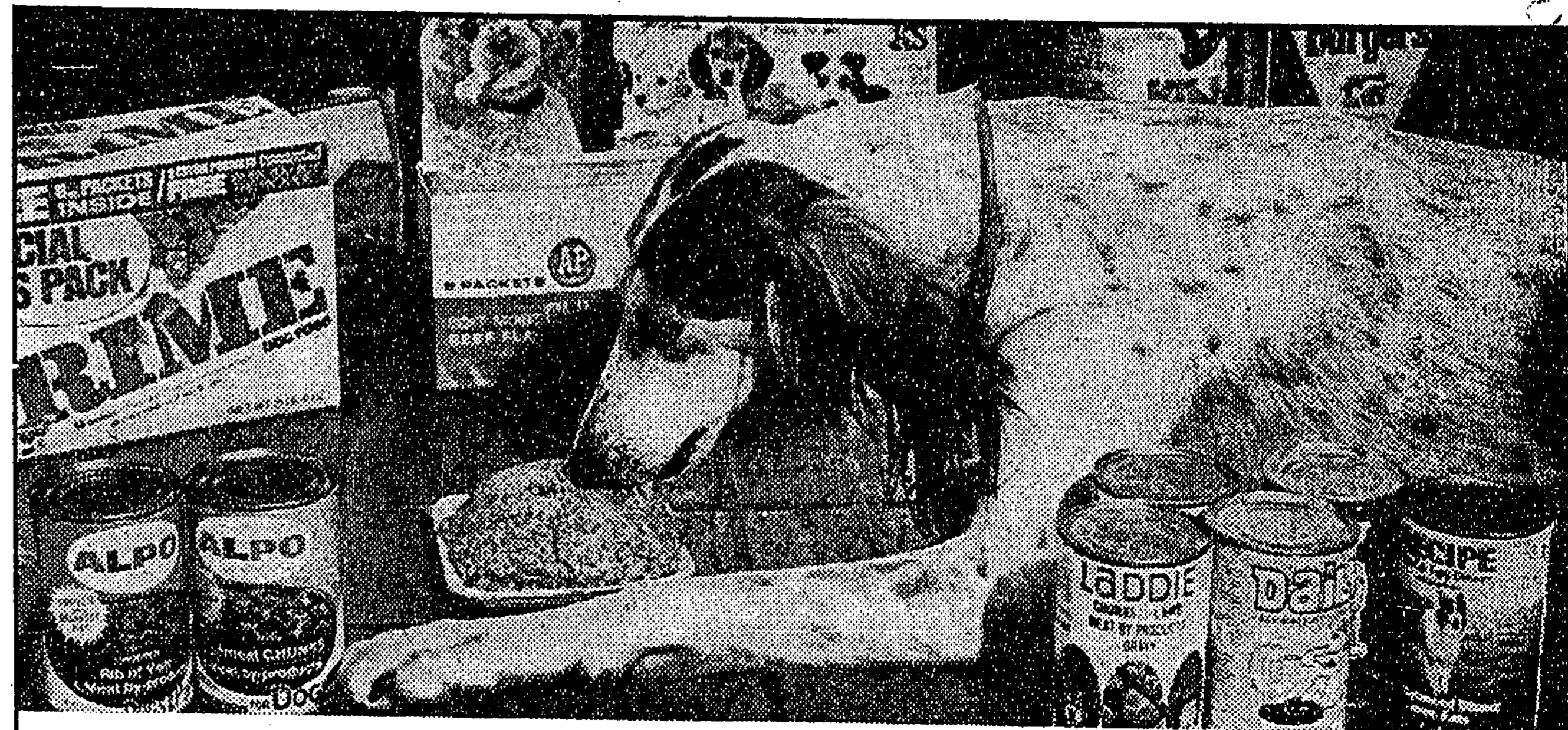
In order, therefore, to survey at least part of the vast current market in dog foods, one 4-year-old Saluki bitch and one 31-year-old male food editor both sampled 11 kinds of dog food. Neither subject had eaten for 16 hours prior to the experiment; both had been previously corrupted by frequent exposure over long periods of time to a wide variety of meats and meat by-products.

The Saluki, known to her friends as Cleo, point-blank refused to touch dry food—either Gaines Meal or Purina Dog Chow—although she was served it first.

On the other hand, it was a matter of some peril to interrupt her ravenous feasting on the other nine varieties, which ran the gamut from raw ground beef chuck to chicken-flavored Prime to Milk-bone biscuit to Top Choice chopped burger to Alpo horsemeat and meat by-products to liver-flavored Daily All-Breed Dog Food.

Cleo ate all the nondry food (and the biscuit) with equal ardor and then took a brief nap. Meanwhile, the food editor tasted very small amounts of the same foods, jotted down his reactions and attempted to rate their taste by assigning a theoretically possible four stars to dog food that could be compared to ordinary human food, and so on down to no stars for muck that would make you retch. The stars had nothing to do with nutrition.

His enthusiasm nowhere approached Cleo's, but he did approve the ground chuck and found the Milk-Bone tasty enough to consume two biscuits, the second spread with butter. The two foods were the only ones to earn as many as three of the four stars.



## To Human Critic, No Brand Had a 4-Star Taste

★★★ Ground chuck. Needs seasoning.

★★★ Milk-Bone Biscuit. Could replace Ry-Krisp with a little salt and butter.

★★ Prime, chicken - flavored. No chicken taste; moist, sweet cubes like yellow cake.

★★ Medallion, beef-flavored chunks.

Texture like cake, a strong meat flavor.

★ Purina Dog Chow. Stale biscuit texture, but subtle meat flavor; not appreciably dry when moistened.

★ Recipe, beef and egg dinner. Excellent odor, like chop suey; mushy texture and no seasoning.

★ Laddie Boy, lamb chunks. Best odor of all moist foods, but no taste, gooey texture.

Top Choice, chopped burger. Tasteless, rubbery, drastically red color, pasty in mouth.

Gaines Meal. Like concretized sawdust.

Alpo Horsemeat Chunks. Awful-looking, smelled like stew, tasted foul.

### Unrated

Daily All-Breed, liver flavor. Strong, mysterious odor, couldn't get it down.

Just below these in his estimation came chicken-flavored Prime, which actually bore a surprising resemblance to sweet Passover cake.

There was no disagreement with Cleo about the two dry foods. But Purina Dog Chow was somewhat more palatable than Gaines Meal.

Sometimes an appealing stew odor belied a lack of taste. This was the case with Recipe's beef and egg dinner with vegetables and with Laddie Boy's chunks made with lamb. And both had a texture nigh unto that of cold cream.

The foods with the most unpleasant taste were the Top Choice chopped

burger and Alpo horsemeat. One that could not be rated was liver-flavor Daily, an inexpensive homogenized food, brown-green in color and similar in effect to ipecac. It was not rated because it was impossible to force the human subject to taste it. The dog, however, did like it.