

Read All About It

Curious & true Kitty tales

'Mews Items' is a recently published book of true and unusual cat stories from news items throughout the globe. It has over 150 astounding stories such as 'cat burglars' or 'klepto-kitties'—those curious cats that sneak and steal items from unwitting neighbours. There's the story of Dandelion from Spotswood, New Jersey, who wanted to please his owner so much he racked up over 700 items stolen from unsuspecting neighbours—mostly socks but the booty also included jewellery and other clothing items.

Some are incredible stories like Ozzy the cat, who was to arrive on a flight to England from the city of Doha in the Persian Gulf, accompanied by his owners. On their arrival they discovered that Ozzy was not on the flight and was missing. He was recovered ten days later after airline staff found him in the cargo hold. Ozzy, had unwittingly racked up frequent flier points after flying between the two continents over the ten days—estimated at over 101,000 kilometres.

There are some unusual stories on cats developing unlikely friendships with species other than human. Or 'Hell Cats'—those cat characters that cause mayhem and destruction. Survival kitties—like the abandoned kitten, found swimming miles from land in the Gulf of Mexico. Those clever and lucky cats who've outwitted, outlasted and outsmarted their nine lives.

Anyone who loves and admires cats will know that they can have great charm and personality. Some, make us rethink the stereotype of the average moggy, take for example this excerpt from 'Mews Items' of the story of Rastus the cat and Max the biker.



Rastus and Max

Happiness for Rastus the cat was wearing a red bandanna and a tiny custom-made helmet and goggles while cruising the highways of New Zealand perched atop the gas tank of his master's motorcycle.

Rastus and his owner, Max Corkill, were the most unusual, if not famous, pair of animal advocates in the country. Together they travelled hundreds of thousands of miles, raising money for charity. "Max used to have a little badge which said, 'cat chauffeur'," recalled Adrian Brady, a member of New Zealand's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a charity that benefited from the pair's celebrity status. "He used to chauffeur this animal all over the place—and the looks they got!"

It was quite a sight. With his whiskers blowing in the wind and his tail up, Rastus stood with his front paws on the handlebars of the classic 1952 Sunbeam S-7 Deluxe that his burly, bearded owner loved to ride. They always wore matching helmets and goggles.

The feline first met Max in 1989 when the black Bombay cross was just a kitten. Max, a motorcycle and car restorer, adopted him at a bike swap meet in Vancouver, British Columbia, after learning the cat had been abandoned.

A few weeks later Max found Rastus asleep on one of the motorcycles in his shop. Even after Max started up the bike, Rastus didn't get off, so Max took the bike out and slowly picked up speed. The cat loved it, leaning forward with his front paws on the handlebars and back ones on the gas tank between the seat and the front tire.

From then on, Max would take Rastus on a daily ride and made a leather cover for the gas tank so the cat would be more comfortable. No matter what kind of motorcycle they rode, Rastus went along for the ride. Sometimes he would climb onto the front motorguard and enjoy the ride from that precarious spot.

In 1994 Max returned to his native New Zealand and, with Rastus, began raising funds for animal shelters and various other charities. They often visited schools where Max taught children the importance of caring for cats.

Every year Max and Rastus helped out on the Toy Run for Christmas, which was organised by a local bikers group who collected toys along the way for disadvantaged children. Max would be dressed as Santa while Rastus wore his imitation reindeer antlers and red bandanna. The biking duo soon attained such a following that they had their own fan club and starred in commercials for

other products. Max started a company that sold Rastus T-shirts and other memorabilia with most of the profits going to the SPCA.

Rastus and Max had formed such a bond with each other that they even shared a joint checking account—Rastus' paw print was his signature. "The cat was just like a person," said John Mahoney, CEO of New Zealand's Bell Tea Company, which used Max and Rastus in TV commercials. "Rastus used to come into the offices here and make himself at home. He would drink tea out of a cup (milk, no sugar) and would get quite testy when you took it away."

But on January 20, 1998, the duo's amazing road trip came to a devastating end. While riding on a BMW motorcycle, Max, fifty-eight, his girlfriend, Gaynor Martin, forty-eight, and Rastus were killed instantly when they were struck head-on by a car driving in the wrong lane.



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As mourners—including more than 1,000 bikers—filled the chapel at the funeral of Max and Rastus, the hymn 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' played in tribute to their remarkable friendship. The pair's matching helmets sat side-by-side on the coffin they shared. Max and Rastus were cremated together.

"Rastus was great, he was unique," recalled Adrian Brady. "This cat was a real biker."

Excerpt from 'Mews Items, Strange but True Cat Tales' by Allan Zullo and Mara Bovsun. Kindly reprinted with the permission of Andrews McMeel Publishing.

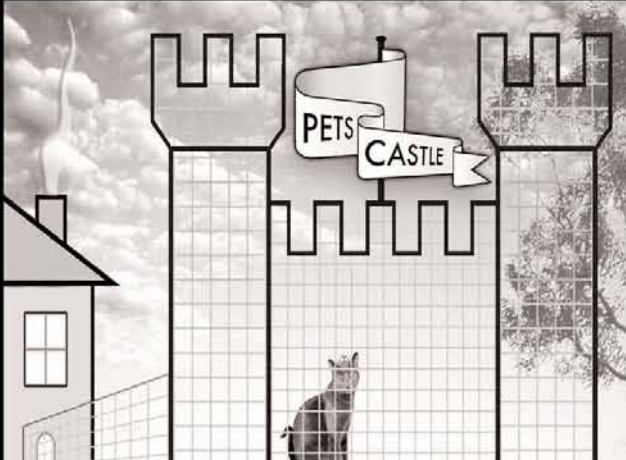
Allen Zullo is the author or co-author of more than eighty books, including the best selling 'Amazing but True' series. He lives near Asheville, North Carolina. Mara Bovsun, is a freelance journalist and co-author of six books, she resides in New York city.




'Mews Items, Strange but True Cat Tales' is published by Andrews McMeel Publishing and available through Amazon.com and other online booksellers.

Photo kindly supplied by Carolyn Anne Aish, a New Zealand based author. Carolyn has written 5 childrens' books detailing Max and Rastus' adventures <http://scribesvalley.com/carolynnaish.html>

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