

Toilet-flushing dog? Ha! Try a potty-trained cat

Meet Stripes, a feline
that can go like few others

On the front page of last Thursday's Press, you may have read about Toula, the border collie from Plainwell who, in earning the title "America's Most Talented Pet," revealed through her owner that she knows how to flush a toilet.

Big deal.

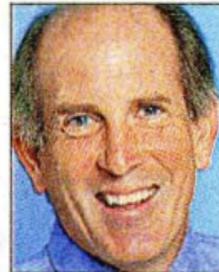
Meet Stripes, the cat from Grand Rapids who knows how to *use* one.

"I have no desire to spend the rest of my life emptying a litter box," said Kristi Gentry, 39, who lives with her husband, Randy, 42, and children Adam, 11, and Faith, 7, on Grand Rapids' North End.

"And my sister kept telling me how smart our cat was, so ..."

One month later, Stripes had graduated from the litter box to the real deal, hopping up onto the seat to earn honors in Doing Your Business No. 1 and No. 2.

The Gentry family wasn't exactly cat-crazy when they acquired Stripes about two years ago. In fact, their first family pet was a dog,



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whose accidental death traumatized everyone when it got its head stuck in a box of vanilla wafer cookies and suffocated.

"Even the vet said he probably didn't realize what was happening," Kristi said. "He was probably just excited to get to the cookies, and then just passed out."

In the aftermath, Kristi's sister

appealed to her to consider a tabby, even suggesting that the family come and consider one she especially liked at the vet's office where she works.

"We're not cat people; we're dog people," Kristi recalls telling her. "But my sister kept saying, 'You've got to come see this cat — it's so smart.'"

They came. They saw. And they returned home with a male kitty that is gray and black with white stripes, ergo his name.

Both Kristi and Randy work full-time jobs, and Kristi wanted to

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MUST BE WILLING TO SHARE BATHROOM

CONTINUED FROM B1

reduce the cleanup that comes with the traditional litter box. So she went on the Internet and found sites dedicated to toilet training cats. (Example: www.birdbrainpress.com, where — no fooling — you can review a book titled “How To Toilet Train Your Cat,” by Eric Brotman, Ph.D.).

“You start by putting the litter box next to the toilet,” Kristi said. “Then you gradually elevate it, until it’s the same height as the toilet.

“Once there, you move it to the seat of the toilet, but then you (humans) can’t use the toilet for four weeks.”

Which is cool if you have another toilet. And not so cool if dad and mom and the kids are relegated to, say, the privet hedge out back. The Gentrys, fortunately, have two bathrooms.

There are variations on the theme, of course, with the trick being to eventually locate the litter box or a bowl below the surface of the toilet’s seat and rim. Once your kitty is comfortable dropping its cargo there, you simply remove the bowl or box and keep your fingers

crossed (as well as your legs, if you’re still using the privet) that Sir Tabster will go like you go.

One caution: If your cat regresses to soiling your floor, that means you’ve been pushing too fast and need to revisit the previous step. “You don’t want to rush the cat,” Kristi said.

In toilet training a cat, a woman must be willing to share her bathroom space with an animal other than her husband. That’s an issue when you and the cat both have to go, something Kristi Gentry has experienced.

“Just the other day, I went into the bathroom, and Stripes jumped on it before I could,” Kristi said. “I was, like, ‘Hey, move!’”

And of course, Stripes, um, did.

Only then was it Kristi’s turn.

Not that the mother of two is complaining. “Stripes,” she said, “was easier to train than our son.”

There’s a quote for the poor kid’s baby book.

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