



## CORRECT LINE COOKING

### *Licking the Plate Clean*

For the first time in several months, this column is totally asexual (as the bishop said to the actress). After all, what could be less sexual than dog food? It lies somewhere between compost and faeces on the scale of desirability (no offence to my more adventurous and/or gumboot clad readers).

The following passage from *Modern Meat* by Orville Schell (Vintage Books) sums up some of my feelings towards dog food. The speaker is a US meat inspector (you know, one of those blokes who can spot a frozen Skippy at two hundred metres, and thus ruin an honest export trade).

Like a samurai, Harris gracefully slices into the bile duct of a large gelatinous liver before him and then holds his butcher knife aloft... "If I'm rejecting an organ for human use but it can be used for dog food, I put a grid on it. If I reject it completely, I put Xs on it. That means it can only be ground up for fertiliser.

Apart from the striking resemblance to the works of Brett Easton Ellis, and the interesting reference to Japanese

culture, this makes quite clear that dog food is literally that which humans are not supposed to eat. Here, the "large gelatinous liver" is revealed explicitly. But canned dog food veils its contents and renders everything the same colour and texture. We are never absolutely sure what is in the stuff, beyond the fact that it's not for us.

And yet dog (and cat) food is marketed in much the same way as people's food. The market is segmented, rather like the aforementioned liver. There is yuppie dog food, for the puppy who has it all. The advertisements for this sector of the market feature executives rushing home to open gourmet treats for their ignored pets (this is the tuna-flavoured equivalent of buying the wife lingerie, I suppose). The lighting in these advertisements is soft and glowing, and the fodder is, we are assured, of unquestionable pedigree. The gulf between human and beast is mediated by quality china, and the pets go for it in a comparatively civilised way.

Then there is the Volvo sector of the market. The professional dog breeder is portrayed, speaking, I presume, to those of us who value rationality, financial planning and sacrificing pleasure so that the Doberman can go to a "good school". These advertisements never feature fluffy dogs, like poodles, and certainly not mongrels. The emphasis is on sturdy, medium sized dogs, forward planning and common sense. Dog breeders are specialists, after all. The dog food they advertise will surely make our pooches intelligent, or at least able to top obedience school and get a good position, thanks to our long term view. A Fightback! policy for the Ridgeback, and all in a can.

Homebrand dog food is seldom seen on television, except in the occasional sensationalist current affairs program, where poverty is illustrated through the depiction of pensioners tucking into it. ("My God, James, can't they even afford Chuck?") The contents of these two-colour cans is of doubtful friendliness, if not definite hostility, towards

dolphins. It sits next to the budgie food, which I defy any ingenious advertising executive to render exciting.

Now we of the vanguard occasionally like to pretend we can escape the market and stand outside its pernicious operation. We hold up the umbrella of alternativeness against saturation by the piss of consumerism, but our feet still get wet. I now present my ultrasound tips for keeping a person's best friend in correct line condition. You will still have to buy things, but the things will at least not come in cans, and will be identifiable, rather than coyly draped in euphemism.

Dogs were not designed to be vegetarian, but neither were they meant to live on meat alone. Speaking as a St Bernard owner (note the appeal to expertise), my sixty kilo pooch likes nothing better than pulling plums off trees, and loves beer and pasta scraps. Indeed, his diet is based around rice. Cooked rice, vegetables and moderate amounts of raw meat will keep fido fit, lively and politically active.

The raw meat should be undeniably the bloody and cruel stuff that it is, rather than the stuff that comes in cans. There is nothing wrong with unabashed offal which proclaims itself as such, rather than the sludgy brown that slugs out of tins.

Any vegetarians who find the contents of this month's column offensive, yet feed their pets canned food, should consider trading the German Shepherd for a gerbil. Dorothy E Shuttleworth, in the indispensable text *Gerbils and Other Small Pets* (Dutton and Co) informs us that the peace-loving gerbil "can get along very well with a diet of birdseed and rabbit pellets. Sunflower seeds are their special delight". Perhaps gerbils are the pet of the future, if this is true. In the meantime, I'll have one hand on the rice, and another on the lambs' kidneys, while two tonnes of quivering Pavlovian greed depletes the ozone layer in anticipation.

*Penelope Cottier.*