

GNAW-THING TO IT



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Brent Beckett competes with his English setter, Slim, for a new dog chew toy Beckett invented to help keep large dogs occupied on job sites.

A concept to chew on

Dog's best friend develops tough toys for big, 'job-site' pups

By Diane Tod Smith
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Wherever Slim Beckett goes, he lugs his newest toy, an 8-inch orange wrench designed for hours of fun on construction job sites.

The clunky tool is so well-built that, in a month of jaw-wrenching abuse, its corners are barely nicked, quite a testimonial for a prototype tool that may hit home-improvement stores in 2004.

Working day and night without a paycheck, Slim has been test-marketing the new product, and the verdict is in: Ruff, ruff!

A serious chewer, English setter Slim can demolish a rawhide bone in under 30 minutes. The rugged wrench has been put to the test and survived.

Dog toys shaped like tools — natural rubber wrenches, hammers, paint brushes, nuts and bolts — are the latest brainchild and the third product launch of Brent Beckett, 33, a Dover-based entrepreneur.



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Above is one example of the dog chew toys invented by Brent Beckett, designed to withstand chewing from larger-breed canines.

Product No. 1 involved a faux leather book with a real blue spruce tree inside. (The perishable trees had a tendency to die while held in inventory.

Several hundred died in Beckett's basement — a lesson learned.)

Product No. 2, a series of thought-provoking designs for

T-shirts and mugs, is still kicking around.

But idea No. 3 may be the home run that every entrepreneur dreams about. Success would be "lots of happy dogs," not to mention one elated entrepreneur.

Marketed under the brand name Ruff Tools, the dog toys will sell for about \$8.

Beckett defines the target market as big, working dogs — (Rottweilers), (Labradors), retrievers, and English setters (like Slim).

On a recent day in Portsmouth, Beckett spots the clientele hanging out at a home-improvement store.

"When you walk through a parking lot and see 20 dogs sitting in trucks, they are kind of like customers," Beckett said.

"Job-site dogs go to work every day, too. If a carpenter or painter goes to work, the dogs think they are going to work. And they are."

See CHEW TOYS, Page C9

Local man sinking teeth into product

CHEW TOYS, from Page C10

Two-year-old Slim has spent a good many hours hanging around, bored.

"The idea for the dog toys came about last spring, when I was remodeling my home and I was in Home Depot every day," Beckett explained. "Slim goes everywhere with me, and I thought, 'This poor guy's riding along, and he's not getting the attention he needs.'

"So I was in the store, standing in line, and I said to the guy next to me, 'I wish they sold something here that I could give to my dog,' and he said, 'I have thought that many times. If they had it, I would buy it.'" And so, an idea was born — and quickly patented.

Speaking from experience, Beckett said, "The first and most important thing to do with an idea is to protect it."

Next, Beckett partnered with Las Vegas-based Monarch Products to design and manufacture the dog toys. The initial manufacturing mold cost between \$500 and \$800, and several versions were created before the final design was approved. Currently, Beckett is discussing distribution rights with various sales channels, including home-improvement and pet stores.

Seeing the idea take shape is exciting, said Beckett, a self-described "idea junky." He regularly generates "stacks" of ideas and then culls through them to decide which ones are feasible and marketable. "I spend most of my time locked away in a small basement office, thinking," he said. Friendships can be strained, he noted, if he asks once too often, "What do you think of this?"

While awaiting the brainstorm that will

bring financial success and independence, man and dog must eat. To pay the bills, Beckett has worked a variety of odd jobs — creative writer at an advertising agency, house painter, cook, janitor and pizza deliverer, to name a few. He has peddled pay phones (a tough sell) and sold belly-button lights.

A home run is an idea "that will allow other things to happen." Success means not having to look for funding, he said.

For the moment, Beckett is focused on following through on dog toys. If all goes as planned, Ruff Tools will be in stores in early 2004. "Very few products are quality enough to stand up to big-dog chewing, and the ones that do don't have any imagination behind the shape," Beckett said. "Ruff Tools makes it fun for the dogs and the owners."