

## Spay Day provides low-cost fixes for pets



AP photo

This undated photo provided by Action Sports Photography, Inc. shows NASCAR driver Greg Biffle posing with his dog Foster, a boxer. Biffle is so committed to the cause of spaying and neutering that he started his own foundation that gives grants to rescue and spay/neuter programs.



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When times are tough, you don't need more hungry mouths to feed. So spaying and neutering your pet is one thing you don't want to skip because you're cutting back.

Feb. 24 is the 15th annual Spay Day USA, and its organizers have the economy in mind.

Spaying and neutering does more than prevent unwanted litters of puppies and kittens. It can actually save money in the long run by preventing a variety of health problems. It's also crucial for helping reduce pet overpopulation and euthanasia in animal shelters.

Coordinated by the Humane Society of the United States, Spay Day events are being held by local shelters and vets in all 50 states, with voucher distributions for low-cost operations. Last year, over 32,500 operations were performed as a result of Spay Day events.

As large as that number is, though, it's only a small part of the year-round need. That's why there are services like Spay USA, run by the North Shore Animal League America, where you can find referrals by phone or Web to low-cost providers across the country.

Don't forget that this is an equal opportunity issue. An unspayed female is an obvious problem — not only is it inconvenient to have a dog in heat, but you're the one who'll end up with the puppies in your living room. But it's just as important to neuter your male pet.

Unfortunately, people sometimes find it harder to see the connection between the unneutered male and overpopulation and behavioral problems. What's more, it's common for men to be somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of neutering their male dogs.

For those who are hesitant, Spay USA's spokesman, NASCAR superstar Greg Biffle, has a message. He's so committed to the cause that he started his own foundation that gives grants to rescue and spay/neuter programs — but he still remembers what it was like to worry about what would happen if he neutered his boxer, Foster.

"It definitely is a guy thing," says Biffle. But contrary to his worries, he found that the changes were positive.

"When I got him fixed, he wanted to play ball more," he says. "He was more



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Biffle wants pet owners to be aware that there are benefits for your pet's health — spayed and neutered animals live longer on average — and that it's not going to change his basic personality. Don't worry that "he's not going to be a man anymore," he says. "He's still going to be an in-charge dog."

In fact, neutering can actually reduce a number of behavior problems. Unneutered pets are more likely to roam, with a risk not only of producing puppies and kittens, but of getting into fights and being hit by cars. Unneutered cats are more likely to have litter box problems, a prime reason that cats are given up to shelters. And statistics also show that unneutered dogs are responsible for the majority of bites.

It's estimated that one pair of cats producing two litters a year can have over 2,000 descendants in four years — and over two million by the end of eight. And according to Vicki Stevens, Spay Day USA national coordinator for HSUS, since the 1970s, when educational programs and affordable spay-neuter programs started to become widespread, euthanasia figures have gone down from 22 percent of the companion animal population in 1973 to about 3 percent now.

Unfortunately, that's still an estimated 3-4 million animals that die in shelters each year. Fortunately, finances don't have to be a barrier to doing your part. "Everyone can feel good about being part of the solution," Biffle says. "These low cost facilities make it affordable and reachable for everybody."

**On the Net:**

<http://www.gregbifflefoundation.com/>

<http://spaydayusa.org>

<http://www.spayusa.org/>

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/spayneuter/>

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