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gnore those doom and gloom reports about the Mac going to the dogs. In fact, the dogs have come to the Mac.

Developed by PF.Magic and distributed by Virgin, Dogz is not the first virtual pet to scamper around the Mac screen, but it may be the most ambitious attempt to provide you with your Mac's best friend yet. Available from retail outlets and from PF.Magic's Web site, Dogz makes use of high quality animation to endear your pet to you, and its screen saver component will offer some protection against would-be prowlers.

Kennel Ration

Dogz offers five different breeds from which to choose. You can play with all of them in the play area. Clicking on one of the five doghouses causes a sprightly pup to emerge, tongue and tail wagging enthusiastically. The five pups are Bootz, Scrappy, ChiChi, Chip, and Jowls, but you can rename them to whatever you like after they're adopted. You can also take the "pup quiz" to match you with your preferred pooch, but most likely you'll just want to see your potential puppy in action. The play area gives you but one toy with which to play, a red ball. Throw the ball and the puppy fetches it. You can also call your dog by double clicking, which will result in your cursor snapping its fingers as you hear a whistle. Again,

your dog will come running to its digital master.

After picking a dog, you receive a code. In the online version, this is done by calling a number and giving a credit card. After naming your dog, you can play with him by double-clicking the Dogz application. Here your pup will scamper around in a resizable window. You'll also have access to some new toys -- a sneaker that your dog will love to wrestle with, food and water dishes to revive him after a rigorous play session, a spray water bottle he won't like very much, and three doggie treats.

Tricks and Treats

The treats enable you to teach your dog's tricks. Different dogs do different tricks, but as a whole, they're pretty talented performers. They can stand on one foot, do somersaults, backflips, and even stand on their heads. As with training a real dog, consistent feedback is key to getting them to respond reliably. Eventually, you'll be able to train your dog to do a different trick depending on which treat you present.

These dogs work for their keep, too. The program comes with a "Guard Dogz" mode that acts as a modestly secure screen saver. In this mode, your dog will march around the screen entertaining any passersby. Should someone try to gain entry to your screen, however, a password prompt will appear and your dog will start barking. This is sure to scare off any potential intruder as well as any legitimate officemates.

Mac's best friend

In creating thousands of animation frames, PF.Magic's talented animators have obviously spent a lot of time studying dogs. As long as you have an 040-based Mac or better, these delightful digital puppies, with their huge, drooping eyes, react as you might expect them to when you pet them, call them, feed them, spray them, and even ignore them (after looking expectantly for a long time, they gradually fall asleep).

One of the best toys in the palette is the old sneaker. A dog will beg to have it and even wrestle with your cursor for control. Teaching dogs tricks brilliantly allows the value of playing with Dogz to extend long after an adoption.

Some of Dogz' features, however, belong in the doghouse. One is the painting feature, which allows you to color parts of your dog bizarre colors. This feature seemed to come out of left field. Another is the ability to take pictures of your dog for uploading to the company's Web site. There's just so many poses a dog can assume.

These idiosyncrasies aside, Dogz is the most entertaining Mac quadruped to appear since The Talking Moose. Playing catch with your four-legged friend makes an excellent diversion from writing reports and annihilating enemy spacecraft.

And while we found Dogz to be very stable software, always be wary of conflicts. After all, we'd hate to see your dog eat your homework.

Pros

- Shamelessly cute

- High-quality animation
- Security mode
- Tricks

Cons

- Surprisingly demanding processor requirements
- Dog-painting

- <http://www.virgin.com>