

ROVER, THE RING BEARER

By Dalia Wheatt
dwheatt@tampabay.com

When Julia Boots and Brad Bazin prepared to exchange vows in December 2005, they knew they wanted a casual wedding. But one aspect of the ceremony was of the utmost importance — having their three dogs present.

“We both kind of grew up having a love for pets and animals, and it was no question at all when we got married,” said Julia, 27, of Lutz, whose mother is a *St. Petersburg Times* employee. “The only problem we had was trying to find a place.” They settled on the canine-friendly Fort De Soto Park in Tierra Verde.

Their brood — Brad’s mixed-breed pooch, Osiris, and the couple’s two dogs, a Boston terrier named Princess Buttercup and a Jack Russell rat terrier called Charlotte Elaine — weren’t official flower girls, but they stood with the other guests as their “parents” exchanged vows.

The Bazins managed to have their pets present at their wedding without letting the whole affair go to the dogs. Here’s how you can, too.

Know your audience. Is Cousin Fred allergic to all things furry? Will Grandma have a conniption when she sees Rover coming down the aisle? At the risk of offending your Homosapien guests, think long and hard about having dogs at your ceremony.

Know your pet. If Spot can’t sit and stay, then he has no business standing with you at the altar.

Scout out a dog-friendly location. Your best bet is a park, beach or garden. Some hotels may also oblige. And if you know of a church that offers pet blessings during the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, then it’s possible they’ll open their doors to your dog.

Find the perfect outfit. Julia made white bandanas for her canine trio. Get your furry friend dressed to the nines with the help of an online pet boutique like ModernTails.com or TeaCupsPuppies.com. For local doggie couture, check out pages 36-37.

Socialize your schnauzer. Also be sure to spend quality time with your dog leading up to the big day. “The dogs hadn’t seen me for a whole night, which never happens,” Julia said. As she made her grand entrance, she could hear Charlotte



Photo courtesy of the Bazin family

These three little pooches played major roles in the Bazin wedding party.

barking. “That made it more special for me. It was just them being part of it and being excited with Brad and (me) and the rest of our family.”

Enlist a caretaker. Recruit a trusted adult to walk and keep tabs on Sparky all day.

Buddy up. Your obedience school valedictorian may not be such a model citizen when there’s a roomful of new people to sniff, so it’s best to have him escorted down the aisle by an usher or member of the bridal party. Practice this at the rehearsal.

Keep all eyes on you. Sure, your guests will gasp and giggle as Fido trots down the aisle with the ring around his neck, but this is your day to be the center of attention. Have an usher or attendant hold Fido on a leash at the end of the bridal party, and if he gets too squirrely, have him moved to a naughty corner.

Beware of party animals... If the ceremony’s at a hotel, send Rover up to the

room during the reception and have someone check on him periodically. If you dare let man’s best friend stay for the reception, then keep him occupied with food, water and treats. Otherwise, get a friend to drive him home or to wherever he’s staying during the honeymoon.

... Or, make it a dog-friendly reception. Hard-core pet parents like the Bazins may want to include their dogs in the reception. After their nuptials at Fort De Soto, Julia and Brad joined their family and friends for a weekend of camping at Disney’s Fort Wilderness. Osiris, Princess Buttercup and Charlotte Elaine came along, too.

Sources: Elena Jones, wedding coordinator and officiant, Elena C. Jones Productions in St. Petersburg; Jessica Meiczinger, event planner, Simply Divine Events in Tampa

