



# Pawsome kitty

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When we buy a load of treats, Guido turns into a cat on a mission.

GUIDO is staring intently at me, his ears up, his little tail curled tight over his back and his whiskers trembling with concentration. No hypnotist has ever mastered a gaze this intent. My junior cat is on a mission and he's putting everything he's got into it.

Target, on the other hand, is lounging on the arm of the sofa, watching our silent battle with bemused interest.

The reason for our mental tussle is a stack of treats. A few days ago the local pet shop that doesn't sell live animals posted a note on Facebook to announce they'd received some exciting new cat treats. Pushed out by velvet paws 10 minutes later, we went off and invested a small fortune in a panoply of exciting cat sweets.

We got big crunchy treats, little "snozzegs" that are like salami sticks for cats, and cubes of fish glop that has to be squeezed out like toothpaste. It's all seriously processed, the equivalent of mass-produced hamburgers and chicken nuggets.

What's odd is who eats these treats. When Target was a kitten, his foster mummy gave him commercial cat food. Guido, on the other hand, was fed homemade BARF (biologically appropriate raw food). You'd think then that Target would be all over the treats and that Guido would hold up a snooty nose. However, it's exactly the other way round.



Guido carefully paws Target's treats. And a generous Target just lets him do that as he watches. — ELLEN WHYTE

Target's favourite treat is quality meat, sliced thin, thank you very much, and presented on a small plate. But Guido lives for mass manufactured, preferably wrapped in colourful plastic with a pretty looking cat on the front.

The snozzegs are Guido's absolute favourite. I forget the name on the packet but they come in little tear-off strips that make a very distinctive sound. So if you pick them up,

move them or even think of going near them, Guido pitches up, feline super hearing set on sensitive.

Although Target can take them or leave them, he is a cat down to his furry tippy toes. This means that if Guido wants something, Target needs to have his share. The second I give in to Guido, Target is sitting right next to him, telling me to paw it over.

However, while Guido guzzles his treats, Target chews his slowly. Our senior cat may be reflecting on texture, taste and aroma but more likely he's taking his time because he enjoys teasing his junior colleague. Because when Guido has wolfed down his share, he sits and stares at the little pile in front of Target's paws. He practically drools like a dog, he's so desperate for more.

Target knows exactly what's going through Guido's mind. Our little drama cat is a fur brain about a lot of things but he's ace at teasing. So he swallows and then sits staring as if trying to make up his mind if he wants more or not. And all the time poor Guido is sitting there, his despair swirling through the air.

We watch without interfering because we know what's going to happen next. This has become a ritual. While Target stares into space meditatively, Guido breathes heavily. Then, with silken care, he reaches out a paw.

Keeping a weather eye on Target's face, Guido's stealthy paw lands on the treat. The claws flash out and then, equally carefully, the paw retracts, claws neatly trapping the catch.

There's a split second's silence and then Guido's gobbling down the treat. His whiskers are twirling with pleasure, his nose

curled up in velvet delight, his dark brown eyes half-closed and lengthening with the sheer deliciousness of it.

Some cats squabble over food but Target is actually a very generous boy. He grew up with Au and Scoop, two cats who taught him, "my bowl is your bowl". The three boys had no issues sharing their food. They just weren't territorial that way.

Guido is different. He's awfully possessive about his food and thinks that sharing is a horror. Mind you, although he'll whap Target for trying to stick his nose in his tuna, Guido never mugs Target for his food. If there's one bowl and Target is first, Guido patiently waits his turn.

Except for treats. When it comes to treats, Guido just can't help himself.

When the paw comes out, Target shows he's a kind kitty at heart. He just laughs as Guido robs him blind. Usually I watch for a moment and then pick Target up and give him a hug. I tell him he's a tease but also an absolute angel for giving away his treats. That has Target purring like a maniac because he adores cuddles far more than crunchies, snozzegs and fish toothpaste.

So while Target reserves his main attention for what's on my plate, Guido polices the treat stack. In fact, that's why we're having the staring competition.

You see, I indulge the cats because I love them and I think life is for enjoying. However, there is a limit on the amount of treats they can have in a day. Guido disputes this with his entire furry being so we're engaging in mental arm-wrestling.

Who do you think will win? My bet's on Guido.

## Are cat treats good or bad?

CAT treats are invariably a zone of contention between people who think cats should be indulged and those who think pets are there to be controlled.

Also, there are pets who become obese and then suffer from all kinds of health problems.

I'm on the indulgent side but there is also the question of health. Therefore, there are several issues that I think about when I buy.

First, pet food isn't subjected to rigorous testing and standards the way human food is, so I buy from countries I trust to do things right and avoid those with regular contamination scandals.

Second, I read the ingredients list. I try to

opt for treats that have very high meat and fish ingredients and that are low in fat and sugar. Also, my cats loathe the tomato, a fairly common colouring agent, so I don't buy anything with that.

Third, I don't trust any health benefit claims unless the studies are published in journals. Pet food and treat health claims tend not to be closely regulated so I take adverts about dental hygiene, hairball management, etc, with a massive pinch of salt.

Finally, I make sure the cats eat a proper diet and don't fill up entirely with empty calories from treats. Treats are delicious but they need their vitamins, minerals and good protein too. Just like us, right?