

Releasing the 'iron bowl', the poor worker started to become the 'pet king of wheelchairs'

A former factory worker in Liaoning Province, China, quickly entered the pet toy market, specialized in providing mobility devices for sick and affluent pets.

Wei Lijun became distraught after her 19-year-old dog Fufu suffered a stroke earlier this year. The animal was then almost completely paralyzed and moaned in pain every night. Wei even has to carry his pet out to live in a quiet area to avoid disturbing the neighbors.

The 56-year-old woman is worried that Fufu will never be able to walk again, but she refuses to give up her beloved animal. Finally, a veterinarian proposed a solution: Why not order a wheelchair for Fufu?

Wei searched online and found a business that specializes in providing customized pet support equipment for only 630 yuan (about \$ 90). A few days later, a new wheelchair appeared and was effective almost immediately. Within a few hours, Fufu got acquainted and flew around the streets near Wei's home in Shanghai.

"It was wonderful," Wei said. "It now seems very happy and comfortable to 'walk around' outside."

Wei is just one of the thousands of pet owners in China who have used the service of Gao Xiaodong, a former migrant worker from Huludao, northeast of Liaoning Province, who has helped countless animals. things get a new life.



A dog uses a wheelchair of Gao Xiaodong in Beijing, September 16, 2019.

Gao Xiaodong, 44, claimed to be the first in China to sell mobility aids for animals. After resigning from the factory, he opened a small workshop in 2006. From a small business, it has now grown into an extremely prosperous business, thanks to the boom in pet ownership in China.

Today, nearly 100 million families in China have pets, an increase of 44% since 2014 and the country's pet industry is worth about 200 billion yuan (about 28 billion USD). Pet owners are increasingly willing to spend large sums of money to give their pets a more comfortable life. That's why the market for pet travel products, including travel products and solutions, increased 40% in the past year.

Gao currently operates a 300-square-meter factory, employing eight people, creating more than 4,000 wheelchairs each year. The company is responsible for nearly all pet mobility devices sold on e-commerce platforms like Taobao and JD.com. *"The vast majority of other suppliers are agents or business partners of the company,"* Gao said.

He recalled seeing a wheelchair for dogs when he first saw it about 15 years ago, while doing marketing work at home. One of his clients built a temporary frame for his paralyzed Beijing dog. This system makes it possible to walk using a skateboard and four bearings.

Two years later, Gao returned to his hometown to try his luck as an entrepreneur. After several failed attempts to sell health care products and computers, he found websites of several pet wheelchair manufacturers overseas while searching for an online business idea. new route. The image of the man with the Beijing dog appeared in Gao's mind and he was sure he had found a viable project.

Gao and his wife, Fu Lijuan, created the first prototype of a disabled stray dog ??who begged near his home. According to Gao, the first car was very simple, made from some kind of wood, rope and roller skates. *"It didn't look very nice, but the dog didn't seem to mind,"* Gao recalls. *"It is very eager to try and run very fast."*



Gao Xiaodong (left) and wife Fu Lijuan were looking at a customer's dog over the phone to make him a wheelchair.

After this initial success, Gao was confident enough to quit his job at a local zinc factory to devote all his energy to the pet wheelchair business. But his parents did not like the idea.

"They looked at me with amazed expressions , " Gao said. "They couldn't believe that I had given up a stable job at a state-owned company to work as a wheelchair for disabled animals."

At the time, keeping a pet in the home was still a luxury for most people in China. Low-income families and pets are more likely to get sick or die before they reach their age. Gao and Fu's neighbors often question whether the couple is insane or not.

"None of them have heard of this business and they don't believe that people will actually buy wheelchairs for animals," Fu Lijuan said.

During his early years, Gao also sometimes wondered if his actions were right. In 2008, he remembered selling only a few wheelchairs per month. Over time, however, sales figures gradually increased to dozens and then hundreds.

Gao contends this involves a drastic change in social attitudes towards animals. Although China has not yet passed animal protection laws for pets, cities have become far more pet friendly than before, even a large number of welfare welfare projects. The material has been deployed across the country.

"The animals often live with their owners for many years and accidentally become part of the family , " Gao said. "And just like when people are terminally ill, everyone in the family will do anything to extend their life."

Wang Jinyu bought a custom wheelchair from Gao for the Yorkshire terrier dog, Gin, in 2015. Her father accidentally stepped on Gin when the animal was 8 months old, giving it a lost opportunity. used his hind legs. The veterinarian said Gin could only live another five years, but Wang was determined to do whatever he could to help him.

Wang massages Gin every day and finds a wheelchair to help him work. The first one she bought was too big and heavy for Gin, the animal weighed only 2.5 kg, but Gao's product did work. It's been 4 years since the accident, Gin is still able to walk outside at least twice daily.



Gin walks in a wheelchair on October 23, 2019 on Shanghai Street.

"With the car, it can walk much faster than before," Wang said. "And now he's always sticking his tongue out, which shows he's very happy."

According to Wang, at least a dozen people asked her if they could buy a similar wheelchair when she went out on foot with Gin over the years. One of her neighbors ordered a wheelchair for an old dog like the Golden Retriever so it could enjoy the outdoors. The dog died a few months later, but according to Wang everything was worth it.

As Gao's reputation spread, the factory in Huludao received more orders than ever before. The company currently produces around 1,000 wheelchairs for export each month, according to Gao. He said that 90% of wheelchairs are for dogs, while 9% is for cats. The remaining 1% is generated for a range of other animals such as rabbits, turtles and pigs. The company has also created wheelchairs for horses at a Chinese zoo, as well as goats on an overseas farm, he added.



A cat traveling in a wheelchair made by Gao Xiaodong.

Gao said he was happy to see more and more pet owners in China willing to help their elderly or disabled dogs to enjoy a new life. And it seems that dogs can adapt to wheelchairs very quickly. Sadly, a number of dogs died before their transportation aids arrived.

"Our customers will still pay for wheelchairs," Gao said. "They often bury it with their beloved dogs, hoping they can run freely in another world."

Gao's next project is to start building a house for pets, aimed at addressing the pampered pet needs of customers. He thinks there is still a big gap for growth in the pet service market. The US pet food giant has a similar prediction, estimating it could double in the next 5 years.

Even so, Gao's main purpose is to ensure that every animal is as comfortable as possible. "We are all born the same," Gao said. "Animals, whether they can go or not, all deserve respect."

Refer to *Sixthtone*

You finished reading the article "**Releasing the 'iron bowl', the poor worker started to become the 'pet king of wheelchairs'**" edited by the [TipsMake](#) team. We hope this article has provided you with many useful tech tips and tricks. You can search for similar articles on tips and guides. Thank you for reading and for following us regularly.