

Termites' worst enemy

Meet Pippa, first dog in S'pore trained to sniff out the pests

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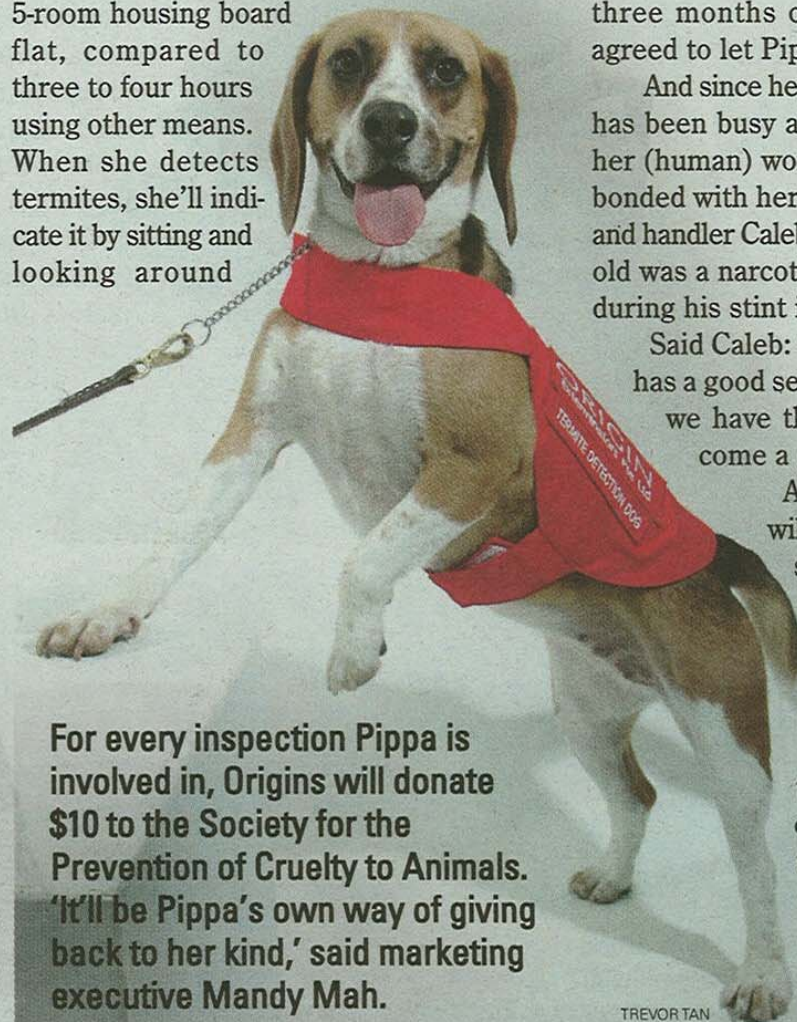
PIPPA sniffs at her work, but that doesn't bug her employers one bit. In fact, it's all in a day's work for the two-year-old Australian-born beagle – as South-east Asia's first Termite Detection Specialist.

The furry foreign talent is a new addition to local pest control company Origin Exterminators and her job is to nose around homes and smell out termites.

"She fits our corporate image," said Ms Mandy Mah, Origin's sales and marketing executive, referring to the company's policy of using eco-friendly and creative solutions for pest control.

Of course, it helps that Pippa is faster and twice as accurate in detecting termites, as compared to conventional means.

She takes just half an hour to check a 5-room housing board flat, compared to three to four hours using other means. When she detects termites, she'll indicate it by sitting and looking around



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expectantly for treats.

Said Pippa's trainer John Elder: "The accuracy level of dogs is far greater than that of humans or instruments (such as thermal imagers or microwave emitting devices) – with a 98-per-cent success rate, compared to just 45 per cent."

Mr Elder, who runs his own pest management firm in Yamba, New South Wales, also developed a training system for dogs to identify termites and bedbugs. His school is the only one in Australia to breed and train termite specialists like Pippa.

So far, he has got eight fully-trained dogs and about 11 in training. Mr Elder said it takes an average of six months to train a dog for fieldwork and each canine is valued at more than A\$20,000 (\$25,700).

But he doesn't "sell" his dogs to just anyone, he stressed, only to companies with a proven track record. Indeed, it took three months of negotiation before he agreed to let Pippa work in Singapore.

And since her arrival on Saturday, Pippa has been busy acclimatising and meeting her (human) workmates – having already bonded with her new "personal assistant" and handler Caleb Loh Zhi Wei. The 23-year-old was a narcotics detection dog handler during his stint in National Service.

Said Caleb: "She is very obedient and has a good search drive. I am confident we have the ideal chemistry to become a good team."

According to Origin, Pippa will be used in all termite inspections, with priority given to existing clients. It will cost \$200 to \$380 per inspection, depending on the type of house.

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