

## Dozens of Dogs Take Center Stage in New Movie

**Shelter dogs star alongside Hollywood actors in “Hotel for Dogs.”**

*By Heidi Hatch*

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Emma Roberts and Jake T. Austin

on the set. Photos courtesy Jaimie Trueblood/DreamworksFilmed in the heart of Los Angeles at the historic Park Plaza Hotel, 30 to 40 dogs performed complex commands on cue, mingled with Hollywood celebrities, and hammed it up for the cameras as they worked on a new movie that’s set to be released January 16, 2009.

“Hotel for Dogs” is an adventurous comedy that follows two siblings who end up in the foster care system – a system that won’t allow them to keep Friday, their beloved Jack Russell Terrier. As the distraught children try to find a new home for Friday, they stumble upon an old, run-down hotel. Although they risk being separated if caught, the duo decides to keep Friday at the hotel so they won’t have to give him away. But in the process, they decide it wouldn’t hurt to house a few other homeless dogs too, and soon a “Hotel for Dogs” emerges.

Seventeen-year-old Emma Roberts and 13-year-old Jake T. Austin are the featured siblings. Roberts is best known for her starring roles in the “Nancy Drew” movie and the Nickelodeon series “Unfabulous.” Austin previously voiced the role of Diego in the cartoon series “Go, Diego, Go!” Lisa Kudrow, Don Cheadle, and Kevin Dillon also star in the film.

Austin admits filming can be a bit unpredictable with so many dogs in the mix. “Me and Emma Roberts were running in a scene and we had a bunch of dogs running up behind us,” he explained, “and Emma got taken out. Her face planted into the pavement and dogs started trampling her, and that happened with me in an incident as well, I was running through the hotel and I got nailed.”

Austin is a dog lover who has two Miniature Poodles at home named Bogey and Bijou, although he recognizes that dogs sometimes have a mind of their own, no matter how extensive their training.

“The difficult part is when they get really stubborn and they don’t want to work,” he said. “Then you have to wait for them to cooperate and get back their momentum. So that’s probably the hardest part because they have a lot of mood swings and their attention span is really short – but most actors are that way as well.”

Roberts, who owns a Chihuahua named Twiggy, agrees that working on a film with so many dogs requires added flexibility and concentration. “It’s definitely difficult because [the trainers] jump in with their command between our lines and sometimes it throws you off a little bit and you kind of have to get used to it,” Roberts said.

Producers are able to edit the trainers’ voices out of the film – so to movie-goers it appears dogs respond without any prompting.

The majority of the dogs on the set are rescues – a full 65 percent. Friday, whose real name is Cosmo, was rescued from a shelter just six months before filming began. His trainers say he’s a natural who stepped into his new role effortlessly. These loving, talented dogs did not stay homeless for long. Most of them have already been adopted by members of the film crew.

Dreamworks Pictures produced “Hotel for Dogs” in association with Cold Springs Pictures. The film is based on the 1971 children’s book of the same name by bestselling author Lois Duncan.