

Dogged!

You see that thing in your delivery bag there? That can thing, with the short, stubby pipe coming out of the nozzle end? Yes, that's the one. That's a Personal Anti Dog-Attack Spray, that is. PADS for short. It's a bit of a pun, see – pads being them things what dogs have on the bottom of their feet and all that. Funny, eh? Reckon somebody earned themselves a fortune thinking that up.

Of course, if they'd have really been thinking clever they'd have turned it into PAWS, rather than PADS, wouldn't they? Less obscure, and all that. Though I suppose, thinking about what the "W" would have stood for in that case, they'd have gotten into all sorts of bother, wouldn't they? Anti Woof-Attack Spray wouldn't sound quite right, d'ya think? And it ain't the woof that's the problem, mostly.

No, don't sniff it. You really don't want to know what it smells like – not first-hand, anyway. The Training Manager gave us a shot of it in the classroom one day, when I first got this job. All I can say is, it's a bit like a cross between a pair of wet socks and a 27-year-old soft-boiled egg. Very effective against dog attacks, wouldn't you say? Yes? Hmm – that's what we thought too. Until he opened the window to let it out, that is. The whole thing was gone within about three seconds. Seems it just doesn't work in what the paint and glue manufacturers would call "well ventilated conditions". And where does a postie do most of his work? Why, in the open air, of course. Reasonably "well ventilated", wouldn't you think? Brilliant, eh?

To be fair, it is actually effective if you've got the can somewhere within three inches of the dog's muzzle. Unfortunately, that means, of course, your hand tends to be not a million miles away from the same three inches as well. Like to run a book on how many fingers you'd have left to press the button with?

No, all in all I'd suggest you don't bother with the Personal Anti Dog-Attack Spray. Not unless your name's Billy The Kid, that is. He might have been quick enough on the draw to get away with it.

Of course, in the bigger towns they splash out on the electronic version of the thing. That's more a sort of telly remote-control looking gizmo, enormously expensive so the Training Manager reckoned, which emits an ultra-sonic high-pitched squeal, "thus confusing the dog and allowing one to beat a hasty retreat", so he said. And you can use it from anywhere up to about twelve feet – perfect for keeping your distance and making a hasty getaway while the dog's running round in circles trying to find out where the agony's coming from. Lucky old posties in the bigger towns, I say.

Only one problem, which is the main reason why they don't bother buying it for the smaller branches, such as us. Apparently, it don't work on Rottweilers or Pitt-bulls. Very handy, wouldn't you say?

No, the lads here in the smaller branches don't tend to have much faith in the official methods of doing these things. They do tend to devise their own, though, like the one I'm just about to show you. Bit sort of trial and error, maybe, but most of the time they've got away with it without serious injury or nothing. It was my predecessor, old Norman, who showed me this method of dealing with this particular here dog. Make sure you learn from your elders and betters, young man. Save you a lot of aggro in the long run.

Right then. You notice these stones you're a-crunching over? These round, smooth, reasonably large pebbles? Yes? Good. Now pick one of them up.

No, you're not going to chuck it at him. That's not really allowed, not without a lot of complaints, and fuss, and involving the union rep and all that. And although they would fight for you all the way, no question, they'd still have a go at you for not just walking away and taking the mail back to the PO. Seems they much prefer to do something like that than splashing out money on court cases.

Of course, you're perfectly entitled to do that if you want. It's just tradition with some of us – the mail must get through, and all that.

That was old Norman's teaching as well.

No – what I'm about to show you is old Norman's subtle strategy for dealing with this here particular hound. You see – old Satan here likes to play "fetch".

That's it, you're catching on. Lob it gently over in the direction of the corner of the garden. Gently – if you throw it too hard it might go all the way to the greenhouse and break something – and that'll never do, not unless you want to be paying for new panels for the next seven years. And on your wages...?

No – gently does it. And now, old Satan here will go and fetch it for you while you're walking up the garden path. Then, when he brings it back to you, you throw it again. Just keep on doing that till you've delivered the letters and walked safely back and through the gate again. Might take eleven, twelve, or even fifteen goes, but I can guarantee old Satan'll be so absorbed he won't even think about the fact that you're trespassing on his property. Or rather, old Norman can guarantee it.

Hold up a sec. Oh yes – it was about this spot that it happened. Yes, this is the place. You can just about make out the faintest trace of the bloodstain remaining. Of course, it was a lot bigger when it happened. Trouble is, with all the rain we've been having it's helped it wash away a lot quicker, not to mention spreading the mud about to cover a lot of it up and all that.

It was my own silly fault, of course. Old Norman, he had tried to tell me. But me – well, I was new and I was cocksure, wasn't I? Wasn't going to take any notice of an old fart like Norm, was I?

No – “I’ll just ignore the dog, that’ll sort out the problem,” I thought to myself. “If a dog’s ignored he don’t bother with nobody,” I thought. “Smart,” I thought.

And to be fair to myself, it was a strategy I’d already used quite successfully a couple of times already. That miniature poodle up at 23 Torrington Crescent, for example. And the sausage dog two doors along, at number 27.

And I have to say, it was even working on old Satan, up to this point. He was jumping up and down at me a bit, but he wasn’t actually sticking the fangs in or anything. Got me quite chuffed at how clever I was. Even started singing to myself, I did.

Trouble was, the rain, see? Made the path, with all this mud and stuff on it, all slippery and wet. Stands to reason I suppose, I just didn’t think of it at the time. No – there was I, strolling along singing away quite happily, when all of a sudden, bang! – there I was flat on my back. Of course, a dog like Satan, well, he couldn’t resist, could he? All of a sudden, I’d gone from being this tall, self-confident authority figure to a small, helpless-looking lump of dog-meat. And old Satan, well, he’s nothing if not quick. Had me by the throat in seconds.

The owners? Yes, well, they rushed out and tried to control him, of course. Took them a few seconds, though, he’d got quite a grip by this time. And they weren’t helped, of course, by the fact that they themselves were slipping and sliding around in the same mud and stuff. Then they had to yank him forcibly all the way back inside before they could phone for the ambulance, of course. All took up valuable time.

And after? Well, they did send some very nice flowers, and a lovely sentiment on the card, and all that. Still say he ought to have been chained up in the first place, though.

There, that’s it, you’ve managed that excellently. Old Satan was so busy he never even noticed you’d gotten out of the gate. And by tomorrow, of course, he’ll have forgotten all about it, and you’ll be able to do it all over again.

Look, I’ve got to be leaving you soon. Sun arise, and all that. Before I do, though, let me say just one thing more. Although I was only doing this job for that one day, I know that it’s one I might have been particularly happy in, if only I’d been able to carry on. I do wish you luck in it, and hope that it brings you all the happiness and reward you’d like it to. All of the customers are very friendly, they never complain about anything, and most of them are sure to see you all right at Christmas, if you know what I mean?

Well, that’s it then, so long now, and all the best. And remember, keep chucking them stones. That’ll see you all right. Old Norman guaranteed it.

Oh, just one last thing before I disappear. Any time you’re passing by St Thomas’s churchyard, do come in and have a chat, won’t you, tell me how you’re getting on. Mine’s the last grave on the right, just before the exit.