

To Touch a Cheetah

Interacting with big cats is an unexpected job perk.

By Robin Rockey

Posted: August 6, 2008 2 a.m. EDT

Karoo the cheetah purred while I touched her coarse fur. While researching an article for CAT FANCY magazine, I had the unexpected privilege of petting a cheetah. Under the close supervision of trainers at the San Diego Zoo, I stroked Karroo the cheetah's lustrous, spotted coat. Her fur felt coarse and thick, unlike the soft, smooth fur of my cats at home. She looked straight at me with her piercing orange eyes, and she began to purr.

As if petting a purring cheetah wasn't amazing enough, the zoo staff invited me to take a Cheetah Run Safari tour at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park. I asked our videographer, Frank Esteinou, to join me so I could share the experience with CatChannel.com and CAT FANCY readers.

It was my first video shoot, so I was a bit nervous. Luckily, the magazine's editor, Susan Logan; assistant editor, Lindsay Hanks; and art director, Jerome Callens came along for moral support.

I pose with Karroo and her canine pal, a Golden Retriever. We were transported to a rustic camp-like setting on the park's grounds. Summers in Southern California can be hot, and this day was no exception — the temperature soared to more than 100 degrees. The cheetah, a large male named Majani, rested in an air-conditioned vehicle to keep cool until it was time to run.

We stood behind a short fence with a small crowd of visitors and watched as Majani raced down a grassy runway. His lithe body moved with speed and grace. It was incredible to watch, and we got some fantastic footage. [Click here to watch the video](#), and let me know what you think in the comments section.

To learn how San Diego Zoo trainers teach big cats to perform and to see photos of the cats in action, check out my article "A Different Approach" in the October 2008 issue of CAT FANCY.

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