**Marleybones**

**Marleybones merges British character and ingenuity with sensible Danish design to create the personalised dog food brand making a difference. Setting their standards high above the weakly-regulated UK pet food industry, holistically-minded founders Josephine and Mikala deliver a meticulous level of supply chain transparency with Marley the Cocker Spaniel serving his dose of inspiration. Promoting healthy living and environmental impact, the integrous Marleybones brand is entirely admirable as it stands behind the wellbeing of all stakeholder including beloved canines, local producers and the planet.**

This story begins with Marley, a floppy-eared Cocker Spaniel with one tremendous personality. Aptly named after the tear-jerking film, Josephine and her husband bought Marley after deliberating whether a large or small breed would be more suitable. They ultimately compromised, deciding on a Cocker Spaniel: a smaller breed with big dog character. Marley enriched their lives with his affectionate and fun-loving energy however they quickly noticed his stringent discernment around food leading him to being underweight which proved to be an indicator of digestive issues. After a meal, Marley experienced food processing through him quite rapidly without proper digestion, resulting in less than healthily-formed stools. Josephine responded to Marley’s condition by supplementing him with probiotics, however when these failed to have an effect she opted for medication. As the mass amounts of mystery ingredients present in standard dog food rendered it impossible to delineate the culprit, the originating factor to his digestive issues was never uncovered. This quandary sparked Josephine’s inspiration for what was to become Marleybones: personalised and ethical subscription-based dog cuisine.

Josephine, a native Dane, teamed up with her long-time law studies and half-Dane friend Mikala to begin conceptualising the innovative brand. Josephine moved to London five years ago amidst continuing legal studies while Mikala transitioned to business studies in Copenhagen before accompanying her old friend in London on their new Marleybones venture. Aside from the name procured from Josephine’s Cocker Spaniel, Marylebone also happens to be her place of residence, making the Marleybones name both considerably luxurious and apropos. Josephine summarises her motivation for developing the brand: “I felt there was an enormous lack of transparency in the market, as if each time I tried to find a healthy and sustainable solution for dog food I simply could not find it. The dog foods which were healthy were often packaged in plastic bags. This was our driver in developing a suitable and transparent farm-to-bowl traced dog food. We invest energy in having a solid relationship with the farmers and sourcing as locally as possible, close to the manufacturer.”

An overarching factor in developing this highly specialised dog food brand was addressing the chronic health problems many modern dogs contend with. Digestive issues, namely Pancreatitis, is the most common issue the ladies often see in their work. Mikala and Josephine investigated which ingredients are present within common dog foods, even traversing a step further by exploring the origins of these ingredients. The level of detail they delved into during their research process is exemplary. Looking at cuts of meat and the way the animals were raised, they were able to discern the amount of available nutrients in dog food. They also found a severe lack of dog owners’ knowledge around the chronic issues laden in the industry. Mikala emphasises, “We found a huge gap. More than 60% of pet owners did not know what goes into their pet food. This is alarming because in this day and age, we are very aware of what we eat most of the time.” Dogs often develop food allergies without the owner understanding where it even originated from. The owner might scan labels however ingredients lists on the back of dog food packages are fundamentally incoherent to the everyday individual making it difficult to ascertain which ingredients are beneficial or detrimental.

Mikala explains, “Most of the time, an individual does not understand industry regulations -or lack thereof. The laws around what can be put into dog food are incredibly broad.” Josephine continues on, “Even if a company uses only the chicken’s carcass, blood or nails, they can legally display ‘fresh chicken’ on the ingredients list.” Food which is beyond the sell by date is typically added into dog food. There is a longstanding fallacy in the industry perpetuating misconceptions around what is healthy and natural. Josephine and Mikala’s depth of research would lead any sensible person to be put off their dog’s food. The ladies even visited several production lines throughout England where they witnessed first-hand which products went into dog foods. This was an immense eye-opener for them. Mikala elucidates, “It’s always the cheapest, poorest quality food going into dog food. The idea of free-range chicken in dog food is unheard of. It is a massive industry we are attempting to change.”

Marleybones is an unparalleled dog food brand in every possible way. The process is such that the owner first fills out an algorithm-based questionnaire which then determines how much food and which type of meal composition is required for their specific breed of dog. The meals are entirely fresh and wet while also shelf stable, due to the fact the ingredients are received within 24 hours and therefore direct farm-to-cooker. The meal cartons are 100% recyclable and mostly plant-based. Marleybones is anticipating being certified plastic neutral by next month meaning any plastics used in production will be collected from the ocean. Each meal carton also outlines the specific set of benefits whether it be dull fur, weight management or gut health. The cartons containing the raw ingredients are steamed from the outside ensuring the minerals and nutrients become locked inside. The sealing maintains the freshness and once it becomes exposed to air it is considered fresh for the following 48 hours. The ladies do not use preservatives of any kind in Marleybones products and omit grains which could exacerbate dogs’ gut issues. The meals are also single-sourced meaning each meal contains only a single protein whether it be poached Scottish salmon, lamb, chicken or beef. This choice was made due to the fact many dogs suffer from allergies related to a certain form of meat product, most notably chicken. Marleybones’ subscription method also helps dogs suffering from obesity as portion sizes are controlled.

Local sourcing is also of great importance to the brand. Josephine clarifies, “Our ingredients including quinoa, chia and hemp seeds are all sourced from UK farms. We have partnered with the first chia seed farm in the UK so we have made the effort to not only find healthy ingredients but also those which support local producers.” Mikala explains how they have minimised air miles and by closely working with farmers they maintain full awareness over quality of ingredients. Josephine relays, “We try to take it a step further by utilising producers who receive fair salaries and chicken farmers who use solar panels on their farms.” They have covered every aspect of integrity and accountability within their products with not a stone left unturned. Mikala outlines, “Marleybones is a completely open book where customers can scan our QR codes to see every single thing going into it, including certificates of the farmers and even their energy bills. Customers can go in to see the suppliers’ RSPCA accreditation and then view the scheme to see exactly what it means.”

Josephine expands on Marleybones’ extraordinary level of conscientiousness and diligence. “Because it can be difficult to understand what all the certificates mean, we have the comprehensive information accessible to customers including details and locations of our farmers.” To make these records available to customers which provides information on their suppliers, Marleybones partnered with the blockchain technology firm Provenance which specialises in sustainable industries. This provides Marleybones customers with a heightened sense of confidence as blockchain’s role is a third-party platform for the verification of information. Mikala and Josephine raise the question of the need for people to read and fully understand labels to discern whether they’re feeding their dogs the right nutrition and recognise who they are supporting, including agricultural farmers. This allows them to make more informed choices when they decide on their choice of dog food.” The 100% certainty, full-disclosure business model the ladies have created within their Marleybones brand is the type of integrity the dog food industry, and any food industry for that matter, needs to raise their standards to meet.