



## House-to-House Hamsters

For the fun of pet ownership with only a fraction of the hassles, one mom starts a critter-sharing system with friends **By Chris Cander**

**My daughter, Sasha,** started asking for a pet when she turned six last June. Not another fish, she insisted. She wanted a *real* pet. A pet with *fur*. She started big. A dog? A cat? No? She downscaled. A rabbit? A ferret? A guinea pig? Really, no? A hamster? Maybe? How about two?

Acquiring a pair of hamsters became her steadfast goal. She begged, pleaded, negotiated. She promised she would clean the pets' cage, tear their cabbage into tiny morsels, take them out for free-range play, and let them whirl across the hardwood floors in those clear plastic hamster balls. How could I say no to such earnestness, such sincerity—even when I could see, with a clarity usually reserved for soothsayers, that, despite my daughter's reassurances, I

would eventually end up the sole caretaker of the critters?

Soon, we were bringing George and Joe home from our local pet store, along with their ten-gallon glass habitat, a squeaky red wheel, and enough bedding and food to last for a few months. Sasha and her 3-year-old brother, Joshua, were instantly smitten.

They obsessed over water bottle placement and the number of wood chews needed to grind down hamster teeth. They manhandled George and Joe, posed for pictures with them, held an inaugural race down the foyer. They clashed over whose room their new pets would sleep in, until Sasha smugly emerged victorious. The next morning, she staggered

downstairs bleary-eyed. Who knew hamsters were nocturnal?

**Days passed.** Weeks. With their cage shoved in a corner of the breakfast room so that the all-night treadmill workouts wouldn't interfere with the humans' sleep schedule, George and Joe became just a bit less fascinating. Some days, it seemed, Sasha and Joshua all but forgot about them. But the little furry guys still needed to eat. And poop. Which meant somebody had to feed and clean up after them. And, of course, that somebody was me.

Then there came a day when I was on a work deadline and trying to clean the house and cook for dinner guests, and do about 60,000 other things on my to-do list. Nevertheless, I found myself outside in the heat of a Texas afternoon, supervising George and Joe as they rolled around willy-nilly

