

# Saving Caspar: how a vet got a tick of approval

By CAROLYN WEBB

VETS have warned pet owners to be vigilant after the discovery in inner Melbourne of a rare tick that can kill a dog in days.

Tibetan spaniel cross Caspar was deteriorating before a diagnosis of a bite from a paralysis tick led to life-saving treatment.

Owner Helen Fisher said the morning after his daily walk in Powlett Reserve, East Melbourne last Thursday, Caspar was limping and six hours later could barely walk. He was admitted on Friday afternoon to All Creatures on Hoddle vet clinic and by Saturday was falling over, panting and shaking.

Mrs Fisher was preparing to give her son Max, 11, the speech about having to put down his beloved best friend.

Veterinarian Bill Ryan discarded an initial diagnosis of

compressed spinal disc, and on Sunday morning found a paralysis tick on the dog's neck. Dr Ryan said the ticks feed for about three days. They then inject poison, causing growing paralysis until the diaphragm stops or the heart gives out.

Caspar was given anti-venom and oxygen and the tick was killed by poison and tweezered out.

Until five years ago, Dr Ryan practised in Canberra where paralysis ticks are more common, but said they were so rare in Melbourne that owners and vets might miss it. University of Melbourne parasitologist Professor Ian Beveridge said there were two species, *Ixodes holocyclus* and *Ixodes cornuatus*.

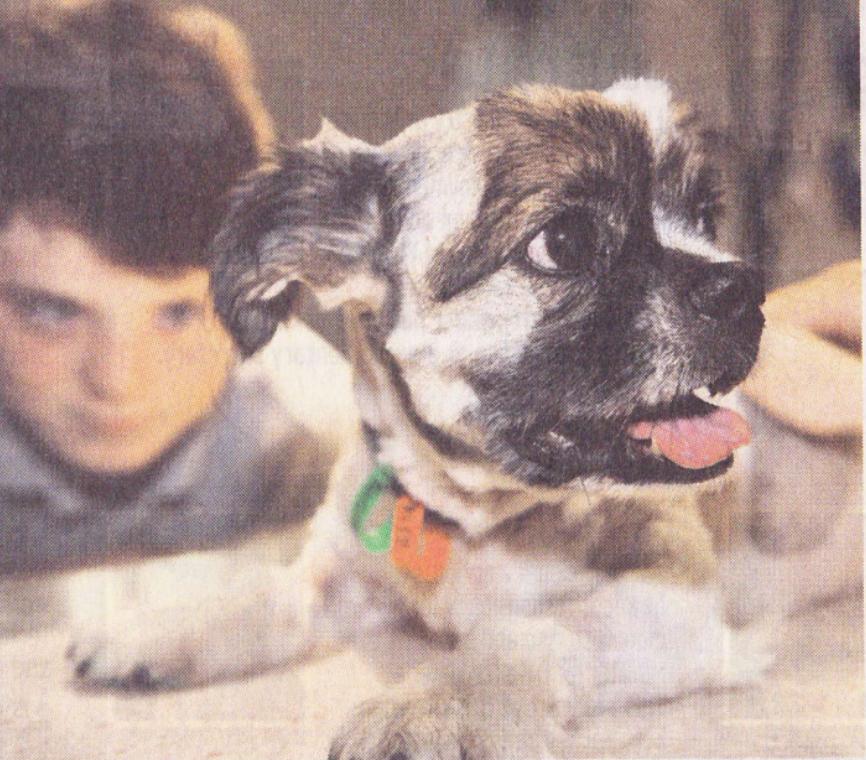
The more lethal *holocyclus* species is usually found along the east coast from Bairnsdale to far north Queensland but had

been known to piggy-back here on tents brought back from Gippsland or New South Wales. The *cornuatus* species, while found in central Victoria and Tasmania, could still cause lethal paralysis but much more rarely, he said.

Rosanna vet Dr Ian Maycock said he had seen only four or five paralysis tick cases in his 40-year career. "If the dog vomits and is wobbling about, it rings an alarm bell," he said. Dr Maycock recommended owners do a tick search and that long coats be clipped.

Mrs Fisher is relieved, "but also concerned to let people know that this is a potential problem."

Max is happy his playful Caspar is back. "It made me feel pretty sad because he's very special to me . . . but he got through it and that's good."



Max Fisher with Caspar, who was bitten by a rare tick.

PICTURE: JOE ARMAO