

Release: 08CDY002  
Date: 06 March 2008

## **Virgin Trains provides First Class service for guide and assistance dogs**

Launching Year of the Assistance Dog at Crufts, five guide and assistance dog owners – with their dogs – arrived in style, courtesy of Virgin Trains, on Thursday, 06 March.

During 2008, Canine Partners, Dogs for the Disabled, Guide Dogs, Hearing Dogs and Support Dogs are working together as Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK), promoting rights of access to transport, restaurants, shops and other services for assistance dog users.

After alighting at Birmingham International station, the five passengers – with canine companions – presented a Dog Star award to Bob Powell, Virgin Trains' on board services manager.

Dog Stars are symbols of excellence, given in recognition that transport operators and other services meet the needs of all assistance dog owners. Virgin Trains received particular praise for Braille signage and passenger announcements aboard its trains. Hearing impaired passengers benefit from in-carriage display screens, whilst space is made available for wheelchair users, who board and alight using train-to-platform ramps. Virgin Trains was also applauded for making 'watering holes' available for dogs at its stations.

Alan Brooks, Chairman of ADUK, explains: "Although there are many examples of good practice, assistance dog users continue to encounter problems accessing some modes of public transport. We're therefore extremely grateful to Virgin Trains for leading the way, making guide dogs and other assistance dogs welcome aboard its services."

For further information, and links to ADUK member charity websites – where Dog Star nominations can be made – log on to [www.assistancedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk)

**End**

**Note to Editors**

For further media information, please contact:

Guide Dogs – [Chris.Dyson@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:Chris.Dyson@guidedogs.org.uk)

0118 983 8281 or 07768 523996

Hearing Dogs – [jenny.moir@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:jenny.moir@hearingdogs.org.uk)

01844 348108 or 07769 901309

Currently all transport providers have duties under Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in relation to transport infrastructure such as bus and trains stations.

Since December 2006, transport operators also have duties under Part 3 of the DDA in relation to the provision and use of the vehicles they provide.

The group of guide and assistance dog owners were:

Visually impaired David Mitchell with guide dog Pickle, from Stratford-upon-Avon;

Wendy Morrell and assistance dog Caesar (Dogs for the Disabled) from Poole;

Severely deaf Sarah Jessiman (with hearing dog, Kai) from Rugby, Warwickshire;

Kate Cross and her Canine Partners' dog Byron, from Burbage, Leicestershire

Kate Arnett and her disability assistance dog Ernie, from Upton on Severn, Worcestershire.