Featured Felines: Cats with special needs 7

(page checked, June 2026)

See also Featuring / Adventures & Travels 9 – Oscar the bionic cat

Ryzhik

Tomsk, Siberia, Russia

Winters in Siberia are severe, with temperatures well below freezing, and cats and dogs with frostbitten paws are not uncommon and often die or are put to sleep. However, the owner of **Ryzhik** ('Ginger' or 'Redhead' in Russian) had other ideas when all four of his cat's paws were seriously frostbitten (I think in the winter of 2018/19, or maybe earlier; I haven't been able to find the date). Gangrene was setting in and there was no option but to amputate all four paws.

Ryzhik was taken to a clinic in Novosibirsk that specialises in creating and implanting artificial limbs, and using computer tomography and 3-D modelling they made paws that would be most comfortable for the cat. They're made of titanium and attached to the leg bones by a spongy part that allows tissue to grow around it. This is a technique pioneered in Britain by Professor Noel Fitzpatrick (see **Featuring / Adventures & Travels 9** for the story of Oscar 'the bionic cat'), but Ryzhik is thought to be the first cat to have all four paws replaced.

Understandably a bit shaky at first, Ryzhik was soon walking on his new paws (see the video in the Reuters link below), but over time was expected to become used to them and be able to walk well and even run with them in due course. In the photo below those look like temporary paws, with the permanent ones as in the lower image. It seems Ryzhik remained at the clinic and became its mascot!

Newscolor (Jan. 2023) | Mirror (June 2019) | Reuters (Feb. 2020)

* * * * *

Dymka
Novokuznetsk, Siberia, Russia

A similar story to that of Ryzhik *(above)* was that of **Dymka**, a British Blue cat, found at the roadside by a passing driver and also suffering from frostbite. It seems she may have been left behind when her owner sold the house and moved away.

Taken to the same vet who treated Ryzhik, Sergei Gorshkov in Novosibirsk, Dymka had to have her paws, tail and ear-tips amputated, such was the extent of the frostbite.

Bionic paws were created using 3-D printing, and have a special coating to avoid rejection. It took some six months for the paws to be prepared, and the first two were fitted to Dymka's front legs in May 2019. When it was seen that the operation had been successful, her back paws were fitted out three weeks later. At first awkward, naturally, it didn't take her long to learn to walk again, to wash herself and be a normal cat. It seems she was adopted by the woman who first found her, Nina Polosukhina; Nina keeps a careful eye on her and tries to stop her from jumping, which could cause problems with the implants.

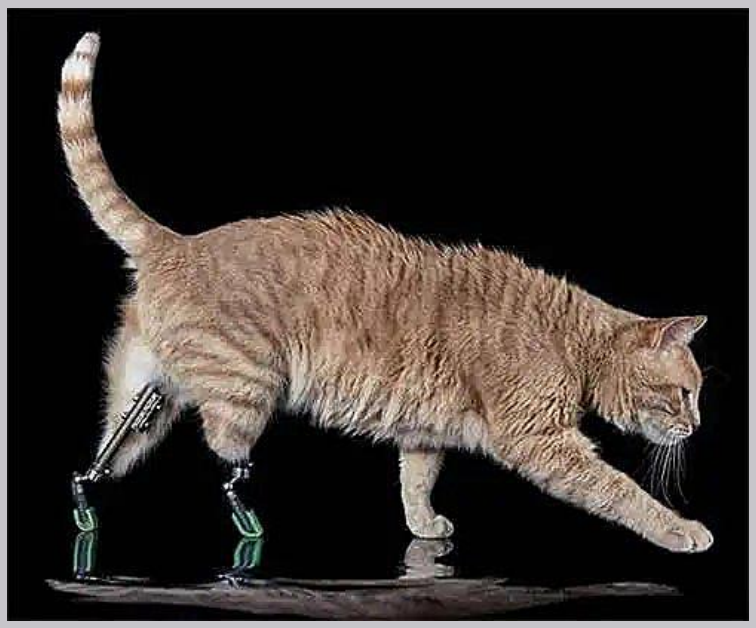
It's thought Dymka is the second cat in the world, after Ryzhik, to have four bionic paws. They don't seem to cramp her style much at all, as can be seen from this video.

Sergei Gorshkov with Dymka and Ryzhik

Moscow Times (Jan. 2020) | KP Russia (Nov. 2019) | NGS Russia (July 2019)

* * * * *

Vituzzo (2024)
Milan, Italy



Originally rom the island of Sicily, six-year-old **Vituzzo**, known as 'Vito', had to move when his lady owner died and her husband was dating someone with a cat allergy. He went to Milan to live with the lady's daughter Silvia and her partner Linda. While they were away on holiday and he was being looked after by a friend, Vito, probably unused to city traffic after his quiet Sicilian village, had a serious accident in which his back legs were crushed by a vehicle.

The women returned straight away when they heard what had happened. The cat had been missing for a day before he was found; one paw was so badly injured that surgeons had no choice but to amputate it. It was hoped that the other back paw could be saved, but it became infected and had to be removed as well. Some temporary 'legs' were provided while a more permanent solution was sought.

Inspired perhaps by the British cat Oscar, who had successfully been given two prosthetic back paws, surgeons were able to fit Vito with two spring-loaded prosthetics, with joints, directly attached to the remaining bones in his back legs, although such an operation had never previously been achieved in Italy. It took the cat a while to become used to his new legs, but then he was happily wandering around ad was even able to do some limited climbing. His story was picked up by local media, but was soon being widely reported. One comment on Vito's Instagram page said. 'The whole press talks about me. But I remain humble.'

BBC News | New York Post (both Dec. 2019) | Instagram | Facebook

* * * * *