

# Marleybones, bringing gourmet dog food to your doorstep

*As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Mikala Skov, co-founder of Marleybones about fussy dogs, business growth, investment from Active partners and why nutrition is paramount for our dogs' wellbeing.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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Marleybones was born out of a personal frustration that my co-founder Josephine had with feeding her own dog Marley, whose fussiness and indigestion meant frequent changes in dog food. When Josephine started a subscription to fresh frozen food for her dog, she realised there was a gap between quality and convenience. Fresh frozen diets require costly, environmentally unfriendly shipments that take up both your fridge and freezer space plus your time to thaw and prep, while traditional kibble and canned wet food offers convenience, but often lack in taste and quality.

We aim to bridge this gap with an easy-to-serve range carefully crafted to provide the best nutrition for dogs while fitting into a modern lifestyle.

## Tell us about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Marleybones pantry fresh® meals offer a unique solution, delivering the nutritional benefits of a fresh, home-cooked diet in a shelf-stable format and in planet-friendly packaging, making it the easiest way to feed fresh

without having to use the freezer. The pantry fresh technology is akin to a TetraPak liner in fruit juice cartons, and we use the cartons to gently steam cook our freshly prepared ingredients in pack, avoiding the use of preservatives.

Marleybones has since our launch become a trusted choice among pet parents seeking fresher, tastier, and healthier options for their dogs. We have grown to £1M in annual sales via our direct-to-consumer subscription platform and secured a 4.8 out of 5 rating on Trustpilot. We have also recently launched in Waitrose and Whole Foods Market with plans to expand into more retailers in the coming months.

## How has the business evolved since its launch?

Josephine and I started Marleybones in 2020 as a direct-to-consumer subscription platform delivering tailored meal plans to dogs. We have since adopted an omni-channel strategy to broaden the accessibility of pantry fresh® dog food, and recently partnered with esteemed retailers such as Waitrose and Whole Foods Market (and more to come!) in addition our online, tailored meal plan service.

By launching into retail markets, we are fundamentally changing the convenience and accessibility of high-quality, fresh dog food, and reshaping the category for the better. This expansion allows us to be present where the customers are and cater for different shopper preferences. It has always been fundamental to how we operate, that we listen and react to changing consumer preferences and market dynamics. Being a customer-centric brand is in our roots, and we recognise that some shoppers prefer the flexibility in picking up a few meals with their daily groceries, while some value the convenience and personalisation our meal plan service delivers.

# Tell us about the working culture at Marleybones

Marleybones is a friend-and-founder-led team (friends before founders, and still friends!), with energy, creativity and agility engrained in our DNA. We are driven by our founding mission of making dogs healthier and happier, which brings a real sense of purpose and energy to our work.

We show up every day wanting to improve Marleybones and strive to bring people together to deliver extraordinary results. We also show up for each other with genuine care and foster a community where everyone is encouraged to bring their real selves to work.

In a small start-up, where resilience and determination is pivotal, we always make sure we have fun on our journey together. And as we're now starting to build our core team, anyone joining will be part of shaping the future of Marleybones, so it's a very exciting time to join our team!

## How are you funded?

We have just announced a £900K seed round, which takes our total funding to £1.4M. Our investors include *JamJar Investments*, the venture capital firm set up by the founders of Innocent Drinks, and *Active Partners*, the consumer investor behind Soho house, Rapha and KatKin. We are also supported by a group of renowned veterinarians from Animal Health Angels alongside tech unicorn founders, digital marketing experts and consumer Angels close to Marleybones.

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

The world is constantly changing, and new challenges are thrown at you

left, right and centre. During our 3 years in business, we have been through a global pandemic, inflation reaching historical levels, a cost-of-living-crisis, global supply shortage, and Apple's iOS update fundamentally changing the efficacy of retargeting advertisement. And we're still counting. To overcome these, we've had to be incredibly agile and reactive to changing market conditions, consumer needs and pains, find creative solutions and cost-effective implementations, all of which has made us more steadfast and better positioned in the current climate.

Funding in consumer products is also at an historical low, and as a female-founded team of a consumer products, we've definitely had the odds stacked against us, with only 2% of all female founders in the UK receiving VC funding. We're very proud to be championing the greater inclusivity and diversity within the entrepreneurial landscape, together with our partners.



## How does Marleybones answer an unmet need?

Marleybones blends the superior quality of fresh ingredients with the ease of traditional dog food offerings, so pet-parents no longer need to choose between quality and convenience in their dogs' diet. Quality nutrition is paramount for our dogs' wellbeing, with 50% of all dog owners considering their dogs to be picky eaters and struggling to get them to eat, and dogs increasingly experiencing health issues relating to digestion, obesity and allergens from overly exposed ingredients found in tradition dog food. We aim to make healthy living for dogs a hassle-free choice for pet-parents.

## What's in store for the future?

We have exciting plans in store, as we're growing our team, expanding our range with more easy-to-serve nutrition, and continuing to improve the accessibility of our range both online and through new upcoming retail partnerships.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

My advice would be to address a problem that deeply resonates with you and that you're passionate about solving. Building a successful venture often requires years of dedication, so you need to be really driven by your founding purpose. You will most likely hit a few bumps in the road, embrace these challenges as opportunities for growth and innovation and always be open to learning and adopting.

# And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

This may sound banal in a world full of more “hardcore” founder routines, but to me it boils down to two things; nutrition and exercise. Don't skip meals and exercise at least 3 times a week. It's so easy to just grab a snack or postpone a workout with a hectic schedule, but it makes all the difference on my energy level! I always try working out in the morning to start with an energy boost and avoid things getting in the way during the day.

Mikala Skov is the cofounder of *Marleybones*.

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Article by Mikala Skov