Friendly feline regularly accompanies her owner

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By Mary Landers

Walking across Forsyth Park, Zack Phillips gets more than his share of double takes. It’s not his red hair and matching beard. It’s not the slackline on which he practices a balancing act. Well, maybe that does elicit stares, but he doesn’t have it with him this day. No, on this bright May afternoon he just has Miri.

She’s a cat. And she’s sitting on his shoulder. Happily.

You just walk around with her like that? asks a passer-by.

Yup.

Phillips says this uncatlike quirk is a result of how he cleans his house. The 28-year-old pharmacist regularly runs his Roomba, a robotic vacuum cleaner. The device scared the bejesus out of Miri, now a year old, who the first time she heard it scrambled up on Phillips for relief. Turned out she liked the view from his shoulder.

He even bikes with the cat. She sprawls lazily across his back, propped up by his backpack.

People just have enough time to say “Oh my gosh, that’s a cat,” Phillips said. She kind of makes people look up. That’s a good thing.

Miri won’t skateboard, though. Too much up and down motion as he propels his longboard. Or maybe it’s Zack drawing the line as Miri digs in her claws to keep steady, though she’s considerate, he said, and seems to know when she’s inflicting pain.

Miri is just as laidback with strangers.

People know her in the park especially, said Phillips, who lives near Forsyth and works at Lo Cost Pharmacy. Sometimes he’ll leave her with the Sunday afternoon dance-for-peace crowd in Forsyth.

They’ll just pass her around, he said.

Phillips is not a cat guy, per se, though he does allow that his mom, who lives in Gainesville where he grew up, gets the best cat specimens, including a polydactyl cat from Iowa. But extra toes can’t compete with Miri’s demeanor.

She is infatuated with this cat, he said.

A friend of a friend found Miri in a parking lot on White Bluff Road when she was barely 5 weeks old. Her pedigree is unknown, but with her silver blue fur and lion’s mane she draws a comparison from in-the-know cat lovers to a long-haired Russian blue.

Originally named Vladamir because he needed a manly cat name, Phillips shortened it to Miri when it turned out he was a she. He swears he wasn’t thinking of the Seth Rogen comedy, Zack and Miri Make a Porno when he chose her name.