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Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors
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Transporting Pets in Cars



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Going on adventures, moving home or a trip to the vets at some point may include travelling with your pet in a car. Even if you don't own a car, you will need to transport your pet somewhere at some point in their lives, so it's important to invest some time into helping your pet feel confident and safe when being transported.



Safety First!

Rule 57 of the Highway code states "When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars." More about transport animals here: www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-about-animals-47-to-58



Consider where in the vehicle your pet will be safest be it the back seat or the boot, and this is likely going to be according to their size and species. Smaller pets such as cats, small breed dogs, birds, rodents and rabbits will need to be contained securely in a suitable pet carrier, and the carrier restrained correctly via a seatbelt to avoid injury to the occupant from sudden vehicle movements.

For larger dogs, crash tested car crates for the boot or back seat, or restraint via a crash tested car safety harness in the boot or back seat for car travel. Crates and carriers need to be big enough to allow the dog to stand up and lie down with outstretched legs. Avoid restraining the dog via their collar to the seatbelt to avoid injury. Ensure your pet can't escape through open windows and if they are likely to chew through seatbelts or other restraints, muzzle training them for travel (which could be necessary if travelling to other countries) or containment in a suitable carrier

would be safer. Muzzle training advice can be found in our article: www.apbc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/APBC-Advice-8-Muzzle-and-Head-Collar.pdf

Ramps or steps into the vehicle should also be considered, especially for older dogs or dogs that can't be picked up as this avoids further strain and injury to their musculoskeletal system. Teach your dog to use one out of context such as at home then gradually training them to use it in the car, helps them gain confidence using this type of equipment. They'll also need access to fresh drinking water, especially on longer or warmer journey's and plan toilet stops for longer journeys.

You'll also need to consider how many pets you have and if travelling together, how to do so without causing distress to them and minimise distraction for the vehicle drivers. This may mean having each pet in a separate location of the vehicle using individual carriers or crates.

If your pet travels in the front seat, you'll need to deactivate front and side passenger airbags. Avoid leaving your pet unattended in the vehicle, this can lead to your pet overheating, cause unnecessary suffering and be targeted by pet thieves.

Going Abroad?

Rules for travel in and out of the UK will depend on which country you are travelling to and from, please check with those individual countries what their pet travel laws are, and also check your pet and car insurance for any clauses. More information here: www.gov.uk/taking-your-pet-abroad

Training For Car Travel

Starting your pet young is ideal; a good breeder will want to help future proof their litters' behaviour and help them feel safe and happy in a vehicle before you collect your new pet.

Taking the time to train effectively will benefit you and your pets long term, just a few minutes a day is all that's needed. You'll likely also need to get your pet used to being confined or restrained out of the context of car travel, so that it's not a completely new experience to them coupled with being in a moving vehicle that smells unfamiliar or may sound strange to them.

If taking a long journey with cats they may benefit from training



to wear a harness to allow safe exercise on rest stops for long journeys, as well as carrier training. Information on cat carrier training and travel here: www.icatcare.org/advice/travelling-with-your-cat/

Start by allowing them to investigate the vehicle, ideally safely off the road and away from heavy traffic whilst on lead. Reward calm behaviour around the car as they walk up to and away from it.

Once happy with this, you can allow them to investigate the area they'll travel in, again engine off. If they are happy at this stage, trial them in their travel equipment, and once happy with this part, you can turn on the engine, follow with a reward if they are still calm then turn off the engine and get them out.

Forming positive associations at this stage is vital so check their body language at each stage in the training.

Take your first journey, make it short and sweet. Ensure they ate at least an hour prior to the journey and they've also toileted beforehand. With some dogs, they'll benefit from some exercise followed by a short rest prior to travel.

When happy on short journeys, you can take longer trips and explore some exciting locations with your pets. If you plan, prepare and prevent problems by training and

not just going on journey's that end in something they don't like, you can make their lives more enriching as well as yours.

Behaviour Problems With Travel

Some pets develop phobias and anxieties with travel or newly adopted rescue pets may have existing negative associations with travelling in vehicles. If your pet suffers with motion sickness, seek veterinary advice. Often motion sickness occurs in young puppies and can lead to distress in the car as time goes on or bad experiences associated with vehicles can adversely affect how an animal feels when travelling causing them to vocalise, pant, drool, attempt escape or to get to trusted humans also in the car. Cats and other pets are often only transported when they feel ill or for routine vaccinations and form negative associations with the travel equipment as well as the travel.

There are also some pets who find car rides a lot of fun and these can be just as distracting when they can't settle or remain calm when in transit. For pets who find travel distressing, it can be distracting and upsetting for the owner or driver, so seeking behavioural advice from an APBC behaviourist under vet referral will benefit you and your pet.