

Travelling In A Car

Car travel is an important part of life for many dogs. It can lead to them exploring different areas and travelling further afield, but it can also lead to them visiting the vet! We need to make sure our furry friends are happy and confident travelling in the car regardless of where they might be going.

Safety first

- ❗ Rule 57 of the Highway Code states: 'When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so that 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 considered safe ways of restraining animals in cars'.
- ❗ If using a seat belt harness, make sure your dog is neither behind the driver nor able to reach them. Crates, pet carriers and fitted guards must be securely fixed in place so that there is no risk of slipping, and your dog should be able to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably within these secure areas. Thick bedding can help to absorb vibrations during travel. If you are travelling with more than one dog, ideally separate them so that each can have their own space.
- ❗ Dogs shouldn't be allowed to hang their heads out of the window as this could be dangerous for them and distracting for the driver and other road users.
- ❗ Hot temperatures inside cars quickly become fatal, even if it seems cool outside. Measures such as parking in the shade cannot make it safe, so never leave your dog alone in the car, and keep them as cool as possible when travelling. Planning journeys at cooler times of the day, using sun blinds and air conditioning, or opening the window a little can make the journey much more pleasant and comfortable for everyone.
- ❗ Dogs cannot cool down as effectively as people, so they might be at greater risk of heat stroke and dehydration. Keep a supply of water in the car and plan where to take regular breaks for toileting, exercise and replenishing water. Non slip/non-spill travel water bowls can be very useful. To reduce the risk of travel sickness, make sure your dog has their last meal at least two hours before travelling. If your dog regularly suffers from travel sickness contact your vet for advice.
- ❗ Older dogs, larger dogs, or those less mobile might benefit from a ramp to help them get in and out of the car. First introduce the ramp completely flat on the ground, using treats to reward your dog for walking over it so they can get used to how it feels. Then find something solid and unmoving to prop it against at a lower height than your car, and again give them treats for walking up it. You could lay a trail of treats along it for your dog to follow. This gets your dog used to walking upwards and being higher than the ground before you place the ramp up to your car. Always make it positive and fun by using tasty treats or rewards that your dog really likes.

Getting used to the car

- ❗ Until they've got used to car journeys, dogs may not understand what is happening. They may find it confusing, worrying or frustrating when they can see people, other dogs, or traffic through the car windows, and some might bark at what they can see. Others might feel they need to protect the car because it's valuable to them or is full of valuable things, such as the dog's family, toys or blanket. If your dog is struggling, then ask for professional help - useful contact details are provided at the end of this handout.
- ❗ Use treats to reward your dog for simply being in the car. Some dogs can be worried or excited about what might happen when they're in a small, confined space and find it difficult to relax. If they get treats every time they get in the car, they'll soon really like it in there! Your dog also needs to get used to the sound and movement of the car. It's useful to give them something enjoyable when there is a change in their environment, so when the engine starts give your dog a tasty treat, and another when the car starts moving. They'll soon learn that it's nothing to worry about as it means good things happen.

Getting in and out calmly and safely

Ensuring your dog is calm and paying attention to you before they get in or out of the car is really important.

- ❖ If your dog is allowed to jump right in when there's just the two of you, but cannot do this at other times when you need to pack the car with bags or give someone a lift, then your dog may become confused or frustrated. Or they may interfere by leaping in!
- ❖ Make sure you have something your dog likes with you and reward them for sitting calmly outside of the car. Keep them sitting while you slowly open the car door by giving them more treats, as long as they are waiting calmly. Then when you're ready, invite your dog into the car. If you do this every time, they'll soon learn that sitting quietly is what results in them being able to get inside, and they should start doing this naturally when they reach the car! Standing calmly is fine if sitting is too challenging.
- ❖ Letting your dog straight out of the car every time you reach home, or the park, will put them at risk of expecting to do this every time you stop, and that might be very dangerous. When removing your dog from the car always make sure that it is safe to do so first. Ideally teach them to wait for you to ensure their lead is safely attached, before inviting them out calmly under your guidance.
- ❖ To do this, make sure you have some of your dog's favourite treats. Open the door slowly and only part way, and reward your dog for sitting or staying still while you continue to open the door. Make sure you are holding their lead before you invite them to get out (or lift them out). Our **Doorways** handout provides guidance for teaching a dog to pass through an open door while giving their owner full attention, and this teaching can be applied to the car door too.

On the road

Start with short, familiar, slow and gentle journeys that will allow your dog to get used to car travel in a positive way. Build up to longer journeys gradually and only when your dog appears relaxed within the car. Drive smoothly allowing plenty of time for braking, as a jerky or uncomfortable journey might make your dog less willing to travel next time!

Some dogs may need a little more time and help

If your dog is showing signs of being frightened about travelling in the car, never force them to travel. This may make them even more worried and they might feel trapped and panic. Either find someone to stay with them if you need to travel or avoid the journey/make alternative travel plans if possible. Avoid car journeys completely while you seek the guidance of an experienced behaviourist.

If you see a distressed dog in a vehicle please call **999**,
the RSPCA on **0300 1234 999** or the Scottish SPCA on **03000 999 999**

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your

Dogs Trust dog please email: postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk



**Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help
and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschool.org.uk**

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.