



Travelling with your dog in the car

Whether you and your dog are driving to the corner shop, dropping the kids at school, or heading out of the city on holiday, you need to keep your dog safe. Follow these few simple steps to ensure your dog's calmness and safety while travelling in a vehicle.

Preparation

Before you even travel with your dog, let them get used to your vehicle's interior. Encourage free exploration with the doors open and allow them to enter and exit your car without pressure. Make the car a non-event and have them practice sitting in their crate or safety harness. Take your dog on trips that don't end with exciting outcomes, such as the beach or the park. The car shouldn't become a trigger for excitement.



Build self-control and patience to teach your dog to enter and exit the car on cue. Practice this procedure in your driveway to prevent your dog from jumping out until you have clipped on their lead. When the car door or tailgate opens, this becomes a signal to wait until cued to enter or exit.

Safety

Buy a good quality car harness or seat belt attachment for your dog and buckle up for every trip in the car—even if you are driving around the block. An unrestrained dog is not only in danger of suffering severe injury itself but can cause fatal injury to other passengers in the car.

Rear seats

Position and secure your dog on the back seat using the seat belt attachment. Follow the car harness instructions to ensure a correct fit and that your dog is safe.



Cargo area



If you intend to travel with your dog in the rear cargo area, use the tie-down anchors to attach their harness. Avoid adding loose objects in this space with your dog – these objects can injure your dog during a sudden stop or impact. Consider installing a “dog safe” cargo barrier or “dog guard” in your wagon to prevent your dog (or luggage) from being thrown into the main cabin.

You can even purchase and install custom-built dog carriers that will suit your vehicle.

Crates

Travel crates offer a great alternative to a harness. Ensure that the crate is securely strapped down to prevent movement, or sit it firmly on a rear passenger seat using a seatbelt.



Even dogs that are already crate-trained will need to practice to ensure that this type of travel is stress-free. Practice opening the crate door and have them wait while you attach their lead.

Airbags

Airbags are dangerous for dogs. While airbags save human lives, they are not safe for dogs. Airbags deploy at a speed of up to 300 km an hour. The impact is likely to injure or kill your dog. Front airbags will also cause severe or fatal injury to dogs. Never allow dogs to ride in the front seat or on your lap (this is illegal in many states), as the distance between the dog's face and the front airbag is too short.

Be prepared

Keep in mind that doors may not be able to be opened in the event of an accident. Seatbelts can also become stuck. Some cargo barriers do not have access panels for you to get your dog out through the passenger area.

Carry a glass safety hammer with a seatbelt cutter or purchase a rearguard that gives you access to your dog via the cabin area.



Car protection

Waterproof car seat covers specifically designed for dogs will protect your upholstery. These can be purchased online and have holes in them to allow for seatbelt attachment.



Alternatively, create your own using a good quality table protector to provide a thick, waterproof layer. Cover with a single bed flat sheet to protect and prevent dirt or hair from going through and damaging your car's fabric.

Don't forget

Whether you are going on a long or short journey, you should carry a few other things in the car while travelling with your dog.

- A spare lead
- A water bottle and bowl
- A spare towel
- A canine first aid kit.



Ventilation

Don't allow your dog to put their head out a moving car's window – it is dangerous for their eyes and ears and would be fatal in an accident.



Compromise and open your windows just enough so your dog can smell the air outside but not squeeze his head out. Dogs love to smell the air, as it is one of the ways they navigate or work out where they are. Window vents can provide your dog with good airflow yet prevent any temptations to jump out of the car. Window vents are available at most large pet stores.

Ramps

Active breeds can easily enter and exit a car without too much human intervention; however, larger and smaller breeds need assistance. Consider a foldable ramp to allow your dog to walk up into your car and save you any back strain.

Weather

Always consider the weather and where you park your car. Cars can quickly heat up during daylight hours if left in the sun with the windows up. It doesn't need to be a warm summer's day for this to occur.

When travelling or leaving your dog in the car, ask yourself:

- Can I keep my dog cool when the car is off?
- Is the area where my dog is well-ventilated?
- Will the car's air-conditioning cool my dog?

When parking your car, always choose a shady place and consider how the shade will move while you are away.

If possible, find undercover parking in a quiet location.